

HUMANITY'S GAIN
FROM UNBELIEF
and Other Selections
from the Works of
CHARLES BRADLAUGH

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and Other Selections
from the Works of
CHARLES BRADLAUGH

WITH PREFATORY NOTE
BY HIS DAUGHTER
HYPATIA BRADLAUGH BONNER

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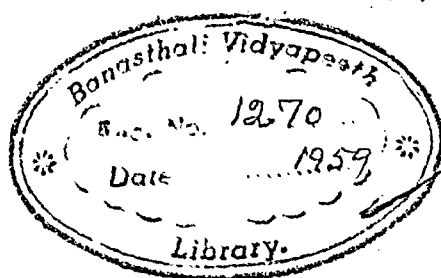
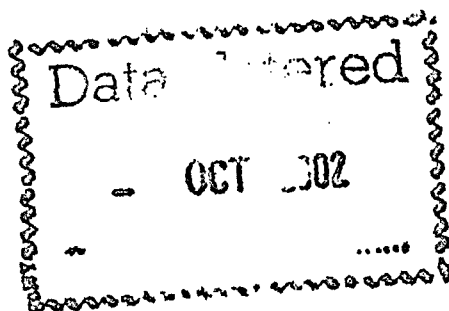
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THIROWN on his own resources as a boy, with every man's hand against him, my father was both essentially and by force of circumstances a man of action, and his writings were usually inspired by the need of the time. His pen and his tongue were servants to be used to further the causes he had at heart: weapons with which he sought to overcome the dragons of intolerance and superstition. Most of his writings appeared in his weekly journal, the *National Reformer*, or were issued in pamphlet form. There are, unfortunately, few books to his credit; for these demanded more time than he was able to give.

The essay, "Humanity's Gain from Unbelief," which gives the title to the present selection, was prepared at the request of Allen Thorndike Rice for the *North American Review* of March, 1889. Although written less than two years before his death and when disease had already begun to sap his fine physique, the paper shows no sign of failing vigour in style or argument. In the opening sentences, commenting on the continuous modification in the

dogma and practice of religion, he used the phrase, "None sees a religion die," which has been quoted again and again down to quite recent times. While acknowledging the good done by individual Christians, he contended that the special services rendered to human progress by these exceptional men were not in consequence of their adhesion to Christianity, but in spite of it, and in direct opposition to Biblical enactments.

This essay was immediately reprinted in various parts of America and Australia as well as here in England, and at once gave rise to a storm of controversy. Sermons were preached in refutation, and discussions took place in the provincial press. The *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, in particular, opened its columns to a lengthy discussion of the subject; and, as a consequence, in the following June Mr. Bradlaugh received an invitation from the Rev. Marsden Gibson, a Newcastle vicar, to substantiate in debate the statements he had made. This debate took place in September, and caused much excitement in and around Newcastle. People came from long distances to hear it, and the hall proved too small to accommodate the crowds who desired to attend, so that large numbers were turned away on each of the two nights. Years afterwards some pitmen in a Durham mining village, talking to me of that occasion, recalled with pride and delight how they had clubbed together to hire a break to

take them to Newcastle and back, and how they never went to bed that night but stayed up going over the points raised in the debate until the hour of their morning shift came round. Such was the enthusiasm of yester-year.

The word "Atheist" has always been used as a term of obloquy by Christians, even by educated Christians who have not the excuse of ignorance. Misapprehension and deliberate misrepresentation of Atheism have been constant, and indeed are not unknown at the present day. In the late seventies of last century my father wrote "A Plea for Atheism," a brief but careful examination of what Atheism really is and what it is not. He wrote this, he said, in the hope of removing some of the many prejudices against Atheists. In comparing Atheism with Theism he gave special consideration to the Baird lectures upon Theism, then recently delivered by Professor Flint.

The "Doubts in Dialogue," of which some are included in this selection, were written from time to time between 1884 and January, 1891- the month in which my father died. The "Doubts" dealt with were either put to him personally by letter or by spoken word, or were suggested by some book he had been reading. They represent the opinions upon religious questions held by him up to the very hour of his death.

Just recently the Rev. R. J. Campbell declared

that "it is not Romanism, but secularism, that is the most dangerous enemy of true religion to-day." What "true religion" is is a perennial matter of dispute among religionists, but I presume that at the time of writing the Rev. R. J. Campbell believed it was to be found in the Church of England. In any case, these selections from the works of my father are issued in order that they may play their part in promoting the cause of "secularism" in the future as they have done in the past. Now, as always, the open discussion of questions which concern the welfare of humanity is a fundamental principle of Rationalism.

HYPATIA BRADLAUGH BONNER.

January, 1929.

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HUMANITY'S GAIN FROM UNBELIEF

AS an unbeliever, I ask leave to plead that humanity has been a real gainer from scepticism, and that the gradual and growing rejection of Christianity—like the rejection of the faiths which preceded it—has in fact added, and will add, to man's happiness and well-being. I maintain that in physics science is the outcome of scepticism, and that general progress is impossible without scepticism on matters of religion. I mean by religion every form of belief which accepts or asserts the supernatural. I write as a Monist, and use the word "nature" as meaning all phenomena, every phenomenon, all that is necessary for the happening of any and every phenomenon. Every religion is constantly changing, and at any given time is the measure of the civilization attained by what Guizot described as the *juste milieu* of those who profess it. Each religion is slowly but certainly modified in its dogma and practice by the gradual development of the peoples amongst whom it is professed. Each discovery destroys in whole or part some therefore cherished belief. No religion is suddenly rejected by any people; it is rather gradually out-

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grown. None sees a religion die; dead religions are like dead languages and obsolete customs: the decay is long and—like the glacier march—is perceptible only to the careful watcher by comparisons extending over long periods. A superseded religion may often be traced in the festivals, ceremonies, and dogmas of the religion which has replaced it. Traces of obsolete religions may often be found in popular customs, in old wives' stories, and in children's tales.

It is necessary, in order that my plea should be understood, that I should explain what I mean by Christianity; and in the very attempt at this explanation there will, I think, be found strong illustration of the value of unbelief. Christianity in practice may be gathered from its more ancient forms, represented by the Roman Catholic and the Greek Churches, or from the various Churches which have grown up in the last few centuries. Each of these Churches calls itself Christian. Some of them deny the right of the others to use the word Christian. Some Christian Churches treat, or have treated, other Christian Churches as heretics or unbelievers. The Roman Catholics and the Protestants in Great Britain and Ireland have in turn been terribly cruel one to the other; and the ferocious laws of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, enacted by the English Protestants against English and Irish Papists, are a disgrace to civilization. These penal laws, enduring longest in Ireland, still bear fruit in much of the

political mischief and agrarian crime of to-day. It is only the tolerant indifference of scepticism that, one after the other, has repealed most of the laws directed by the Established Christian Church against Papists and Dissenters, and also against Jews and heretics. Church of England clergymen have in the past gone to great lengths in denouncing nonconformity; and even in the present day an effective sample of such denunciatory bigotry may be found in a sort of orthodox catechism written by the Rev. F. A. Gace, of Great Barling, Essex, the popularity of which is vouched by the fact that it has gone through ten editions. This catechism for little children teaches that "Di-sent is a great sin," and that Dissenters "worship God according to their own evil and corrupt imaginations, and not according to his revealed will, and therefore their worship is idolatrous." Church of England Christians and Dissenting Christians, when fraternizing amongst themselves, often publicly draw the line at Unitarians, and positively deny that these have any sort of right to call themselves Christians.

In the first half of the seventeenth century Quakers were flogged and imprisoned in England as blasphemers; and the early Christian settlers in New England, escaping from the persecution of Old World Christians, showed scant mercy to the followers of Fox and Penn. It is customary, in controversy, for those advocating the claims of Chris-

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tianity, to include all good done by men in nominally Christian countries as if such good were the result of Christianity, while they contend that the evil which exists prevails in spite of Christianity. I shall try to make out that the ameliorating march of the last few centuries has been initiated by the heretics of each age, though I quite concede that the men and women denounced and persecuted as infidels by the pious of one century are frequently claimed as saints by the pious of a later generation.

What, then, is Christianity? As a system or scheme of doctrine, Christianity may, I submit, not unfairly be gathered from the Old and New Testaments. It is true that some Christians to-day desire to escape from submission to portions, at any rate, of the Old Testament; but this very tendency seems to me to be part of the result of the beneficial heresy for which I am pleading. Man's humanity has revolted against Old Testament barbarism, and therefore he has attempted to dissociate the Old Testament from Christianity. Unless Old and New Testaments are accepted as God's revelation to man, Christianity has no higher claim than any other of the world's many religions, if no such claim can be made out for it apart from the Bible. And though it is quite true that some who deem themselves Christians put the Old Testament completely in the background, this is, I allege, because they are out-growing their Christianity. Without the

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doctrine of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, Christianity, as a religion, is naught ; but unless the story of Adam's fall is accepted, the redemption from the consequences of that fall cannot be believed. Both in Great Britain and in the United States the Old and New Testaments are forced on the people as part of Christianity ; for it is blasphemy at common law to deny the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be of divine authority ; and such denial is punishable with fine and imprisonment, or even worse. The rejection of Christianity intended throughout this paper is therefore the rejection of the Old and New Testaments as being of divine revelation. It is the rejection alike of the authorized teachings of the Church of Rome and of the Church of England, as these may be found in the Bible, the creeds, the encyclicals, the prayer book, the canons and homilies of either or both of these Churches. It is the rejection of the Christianity of Luther, of Calvin, and of Wesley.

A ground frequently taken by Christian theologians is that the progress and civilization of the world are due to Christianity ; and the discussion is complicated by the fact that many eminent servants of humanity have been nominal Christians, of one or other of the sects. My allegation will be that the special services rendered to human progress by these exceptional men have not been in consequence of their adhesion to Christianity, but in

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spite of it, and that the specific points of advantage to human kind have been in ratio of their direct opposition to precise Biblical enactments.

A. S. Farrar says¹ that Christianity "asserts authority over religious belief in virtue of being a supernatural communication from God, and claims the right to control human thought in virtue of possessing sacred books, which are at once the record and the instrument of the communication, written by men endowed with supernatural inspiration." Unbelievers refuse to submit to the asserted authority, and deny this claim of control over human thought; they allege that every effort at freethinking must provoke sturdier thought.

Take one clear gain to humanity consequent on unbelief—*i.e.*, in the abolition of slavery in some countries, in the abolition of the slave trade in most civilized countries, and in the tendency to its total abolition. I am unaware of any religion in the world which in the past forbade slavery. The professors of Christianity for ages supported it; the Old Testament repeatedly sanctioned it by special laws, the New Testament has no repealing declaration. Though we are at the close of the nineteenth century of the Christian era, it is only during the past three-quarters of a century that the battle for freedom has been gradually won. It is scarcely a quarter of a century since the famous emancipa-

¹ Farrar's "Critical History of Free Thought."

tion amendment was carried to the United States Constitution. And it is impossible for any well-informed Christian to deny that the abolition movement in North America was most steadily and bitterly opposed by the religious bodies in the various States. Henry Wilson, in his "Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America"; Samuel J. May, in his "Recollections of the Anti-Slavery Conflict"; and J. Greenleaf Whittier, in his poems, alike are witnesses that the Bible and pulpit, the Church and its great influence, were used against abolition and in favour of the slave-owner. I know that Christians in the present day often declare that Christianity had a large share in bringing about the abolition of slavery, and this because men professing Christianity were abolitionists. I plead that these so-called Christian abolitionists were men and women whose humanity, recognizing freedom for all, was in this in direct conflict with Christianity. It is not yet fifty years since the European Christian powers jointly agreed to abolish the slave trade. What of the effect of Christianity on these powers in the centuries which had preceded? The heretic Condorcet pleaded powerfully for freedom whilst Christian France was still slave-holding. For many centuries Christian Spain and Christian Portugal held slaves. Porto Rico freedom is not of long date: and Cuban emancipation is even yet newer. It was a Christian King, Charles V, and a Christian friar, who founded in

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Spanish America the slave trade between the Old World and the New. For some 1800 years, almost, Christians kept slaves, bought slaves, sold slaves, bred slaves, stole slaves. Pious Bristol and godly Liverpool less than 100 years ago openly grew rich on the traffic. During the ninth century Greek Christians sold slaves to the Saracens. In the eleventh century prostitutes were publicly sold as slaves in Rome, and the profit went to the Church.

It is said that William Wilberforce, the abolitionist, was a Christian. But at any rate his Christianity was strongly diluted with unbelief. As an abolitionist he did not believe Leviticus xxv. 44-6; he must have rejected Exodus xxi. 2-6; he could not have accepted the many permissions and injunctions by the Bible deny to his chosen people to capture and hold slaves. In the House of Commons on 18th February, 1796, Wilberforce reminded that Christian assembly that infidel and anarchic France had given liberty to the Africans, whilst Christian and monarchic England was "obstinately continuing a system of cruelty and injustice."

Wilberforce, whilst advocating the abolition of slavery, found the whole influence of the English Court, and the great weight of the Episcopal Bench, against him. George III, a most Christian king, regarded abolition theories with abhorrence, and the Christian House of Lords was utterly opposed to granting freedom to the slave. When Christian

missionaries some sixty-two years ago preached to Demerara negroes under the rule of Christian England, they were treated by Christian judges, holding commission from Christian England, as criminals for so preaching. A Christian commissioned officer, member of the Established Church of England, signed the auction notices for the sale of slaves as late as the year 1824. In the evidence before a Christian court-martial, a missionary is charged with having tended to make the negroes dissatisfied with their condition as slaves, and with having promoted discontent and dissatisfaction amongst the slaves against their lawful masters. For this the Christian judges sentenced the Demerara abolitionist missionary to be hanged by the neck till he was dead. The judges belonged to the Established Church; the missionary was a Methodist. In this the Church of England Christians in Demerara were no worse than Christians of other sects; their Roman Catholic Christian brethren in St. Domingo fiercely attacked the Jesuits as criminals because they treated negroes as though they were men and women, in encouraging "two slaves to separate their interest and safety from that of the gang," whilst orthodox Christians let them couple promiscuously and breed for the benefit of their owners like any other of their plantation cattle. In 1823 the *Royal Gazette* (Christian) of Demerara said: "We shall not suffer you to enlighten our slaves, who are by law our property, till

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you can demonstrate that when they are made religious and knowing they will continue to be our slaves."

When William Lloyd Garrison, the pure-minded and most earnest abolitionist, delivered his first anti-slavery address in Boston, Massachusetts, the only building he could obtain, in which to speak, was the infidel hall owned by Abner Kneeland, the "infidel" editor of the *Boston Investigator*, who had been sent to gaol for blasphemy. Every Christian sect had in turn refused Mr. Lloyd Garrison the use of the buildings they severally controlled. Lloyd Garrison told me himself how honoured deacons of a Christian Church joined in an actual attempt to hang him.

When abolition was advocated in the United States in 1790, the representative from South Carolina was able to plead that the Southern clergy "did not condemn either slavery or the slave trade"; and Mr. Jackson, the representative from Georgia, pleaded that "from Genesis to Revelation" the current was favourable to slavery. Elias Hicks, the brave Abolitionist Quaker, was denounced as an Atheist, and less than twenty years ago a Hicksite Quaker was expelled from one of the Southern American Legislatures because of the reputed irreligion of these abolitionist "Friends."

When the Fugitive Slave Law was under discussion in North America, large numbers of clergymen of nearly every denomination were found ready to

defend this infamous law. Samuel James May, the famous abolitionist, was driven from the pulpit as irreligious, solely because of his attacks on slaveholding. Northern clergymen tried to induce "silver tongued" Wendell Phillips to abandon his advocacy of abolition. Southern pulpits rang with praises for the murderous attack on Charles Sumner. The slayers of Elijah Lovejoy were highly reputed Christian men.

Guizot, notwithstanding that he tries to claim that the Church exerted its influence to restrain slavery, says ("European Civilization," vol. i., p. 110): "It has often been repeated that the abolition of slavery among modern people is entirely due to Christians. That, I think, is saying too much. Slavery existed for a long period in the heart of Christian society, without its being particularly astonished or irritated. A multitude of causes, and a great development in other ideas and principles of civilization, were necessary for the abolition of this iniquity of all iniquities." And my contention is that this "development in other ideas and principles of civilization" was long retarded by Governments in which the Christian Church was dominant. The men who advocated liberty were imprisoned, racked, and burned, so long as the Church was strong enough to be merciless.

The Rev. Francis Minton, Rector of Middlewich, in his recent earnest volume¹ on the struggles of

¹ "Capital and Wages," p. 19.

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labour, admits that "a few centuries ago slavery was acknowledged throughout Christendom to have the divine sanction. . . . Neither the exact cause, nor the precise time of the decline of the belief in the righteousness of slavery, can be defined. It was doubtless due to a combination of causes, one probably being as indirect as the recognition of the greater economy of free labour. With the decline of the belief the abolition of slavery took place."

The institution of slavery was actually existent in Christian Scotland in the seventeenth century, where the white coal workers and salt workers of East Lothian were chattels, as were their negro brethren in the Southern States thirty years since; they "went to those who succeeded to the property of the works, and they could be sold, bartered, or pawned."¹ "There is," says J. M. Robertson, "no trace that the Protestant clergy of Scotland ever raised a voice against the slavery which grew up before their eyes. And it was not until 1799, after republican and irreligious France had set the example, that it was legally abolished."

Take further the gain to humanity consequent on the unbelief, or rather disbelief, in witchcraft and wizardry. Apart from the brutality by Christians towards those suspected of witchcraft, the hindrance to scientific initiative or experiment was incalculably great so long as belief in magic obtained.

¹ "Perversion of Scotland," p. 197.

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The inventions of the past two centuries, and especially those of the eighteenth century, might have benefited mankind much earlier and much more largely, but for the foolish belief in witchcraft and the shocking ferocity exhibited against those suspected of necromancy. After quoting a large number of cases of trial and punishment for witchcraft from official records in Scotland, J. M. Robertson says: "The people seem to have passed from cruelty to cruelty precisely as they became more and more fanatical, more and more devoted to their Church, till after many generations the slow spread of human science began to counteract the ravages of superstition, the clergy resisting reason and humanity to the last."

The Rev. Mr. Minton¹ concedes that it is "the advance of knowledge which has rendered the idea of Satanic agency through the medium of witchcraft grotesquely ridiculous." He admits that "for more than 1,500 years the belief in witchcraft was universal in Christendom," and that "the public mind was saturated with the idea of Satanic agency in the economy of nature." He adds: "If we ask why the world now rejects what was once so unquestioningly believed, we can only reply that advancing knowledge has gradually undermined the belief."

In a letter recently sent to the *Pall Mall Gazette* against modern Spiritualism, Professor Huxley

¹ "Capital and Wages," pp. 15, 16.

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declares "that the older form of the same fundamental delusion—the belief in possession and in witchcraft—gave rise in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries to persecutions by Christians of innocent men, women, and children, more extensive, more cruel, and more murderous than any to which the Christians of the first three centuries were subjected by the authorities of pagan Rome." And Professor Huxley adds: "No one deserves much blame for being deceived in these matters. We are all intellectually handicapped in youth by the incessant repetition of the stories about possession and witchcraft in both the Old and the New Testaments. The majority of us are taught nothing which will help us to observe accurately and to interpret observations with due caution."

The English Statute Book under Elizabeth and under James was disfigured by enactments against witchcraft passed under pressure from the Christian Churches, which Acts have been repealed only in consequence of the disbelief in the Christian precept, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." The statute 1 James I, c. 12, condemned to death "all persons invoking any evil spirits, or consulting, covenanting with, entertaining, employing, feeding, or rewarding any evil spirit," or generally practising any "infernal arts." This was not repealed until the eighteenth century was far advanced. Edison's phonograph would 280 years ago have ensured martyrdom for

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its inventor ; the utilization of electric force to transmit messages around the world would have been clearly the practice of an infernal art. At least we may plead that unbelief has healed the bleeding feet of Science, and made the road free for her upward march.

Is it not also fair to urge the gain to humanity which has been apparent in the wiser treatment of the insane, consequent on the unbelief in the Christian doctrine that these unfortunates were examples either of demoniacal possession or of special visitation of deity ? For centuries under Christianity mental disease was most ignorantly treated. Exorcism, shackles, and the whip were the penalties rather than the curatives for mental maladies. From the heretical departure of Pinel at the close of the last century to the position of Maudsley to-day, every step illustrates the march of unbelief. Take the gain to humanity in the unbelief not yet complete, but now largely preponderant, in the dogma that sickness, pestilence, and famine were manifestations of divine anger, the results of which could neither be avoided nor prevented. The Christian Churches have done little or nothing to dispel this superstition. The official and authorized prayers of the principal denominations, even to day, reaffirm it. Modern study of the laws of health, experiments in sanitary improvements, more careful applications of medical knowledge, have proved more efficacious in preventing or diminishing plagues and pestilence than have the

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intervention of the priest or the practice of prayer. Those in England who hold the old faith that prayer will suffice to cure disease are to-day termed "peculiar people," and are occasionally indicted for manslaughter when their sick children die, because the parents have trusted to God instead of appealing to the resources of science.

It is certainly a clear gain to astronomical science that the Church which tried to compel Galileo to unsay the truth has been overborne by the growing unbelief of the age, even though our little children are yet taught that Joshua made the sun and moon stand still, and that for Hezekiah the sun-dial reversed its record. As Buckle, arguing for the morality of scepticism, says:¹ "As long as men refer the movements of the comets to the immediate finger of God, and as long as they believe that an eclipse is one of the modes by which the deity expresses his anger, they will never be guilty of the blasphemous presumption of attempting to predict such supernatural appearances. Before they could dare to investigate the causes of these mysterious phenomena, it is necessary that they should believe, or at all events that they should suspect, that the phenomena themselves were capable of being explained by the human mind."

As in astronomy so in geology, the gain of knowledge to humanity has been almost solely in measure

¹ "History of Civilization," vol. i, p. 345.

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of the rejection of the Christian theory. A century since it was almost universally held that the world was created 6,000 years ago, or, at any rate, that by the sin of the first man, Adam, death commenced about that period. Ethnology and Anthropology have only been possible in so far as, adopting the regretful words of Sir W. Jones, "intelligent and virtuous persons are inclined to doubt the authenticity of the accounts delivered by Moses concerning the primitive world."

Surely it is clear gain to humanity that unbelief has sprung up against the divine right of kings, that men no longer believe that the monarch is "God's anointed" or that "the powers that be are ordained of God." In the struggles for political freedom the weight of the Church was mostly thrown on the side of the tyrant. The homilies of the Church of England declare that "even the wicked rulers have their power and authority from God," and that "such subjects as are disobedient or rebellious against their princes disobey God and procure their own damnation." It can scarcely be necessary to argue to the citizens of the United States of America that the origin of their liberties was in the rejection of faith in the divine right of George III.

Will any one, save the most bigoted, contend that it is not certain gain to humanity to spread unbelief in the terrible doctrine that eternal torment is the probable fate of the great majority of the human family? Is it not gain to have diminished

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the faith that it was the duty of the wretched and the miserable to be content with the lot in life which providence had awarded them?

If it stood alone it would be almost sufficient to plead as justification for heresy the approach towards equality and liberty for the utterance of all opinions achieved because of growing unbelief. At one period in Christendom each Government acted as though only one religious faith could be true, and as though the holding, or at any rate the making known, any other opinion was a criminal act deserving punishment. Under the one word "infidel," even as late as Lord Coke, were classed together all who were not Christians, even though they were Mohammedans, Brahmins, or Jews. All who did not accept the Christian faith were sweepingly denounced as infidels and therefore *hors de la loi*. One hundred and forty-five years since, the Attorney-General, pleading in our highest court, said:¹ "What is the definition of an infidel? Why, one who does not believe in the Christian religion. Then a Jew is an infidel." And English history for several centuries prior to the Commonwealth shows how habitually and most atrociously Christian kings, Christian courts, and Christian churches persecuted and harassed these infidel Jews. There was a time in England when Jews were such infidels that they were not even allowed to be sworn as witnesses. In 1740 a legacy

¹ *Omychund v. Barker*, 1 Atkyns 29.

left for establishing an assembly for the reading of the Jewish scriptures was held to be void¹ because it was "for the propagation of the Jewish law in contradiction to the Christian religion." It is only in very modern times that municipal rights have been accorded in England to Jews. It is barely thirty years since they have been allowed to sit in Parliament. In 1851 the late Mr. Newdegate in debate² objected "that they should have sitting in that House an individual who regarded our Redeemer as an impostor." Lord Chief Justice Raymond has shown³ how it was that Christian intolerance was gradually broken down. "A Jew may sue at this day, but heretofore he could not; for then they were looked upon as enemies, but now commerce has taught the world more humanity."

Lord Coke treated the infidel as one who in law had no right of any kind, with whom no contract need be kept, to whom no debt was payable. The plea of alien infidel as answer to a claim was actually pleaded in court as late as 1737.⁴ In a solemn judgment, Lord Coke says⁵: "All infidels are in law *perpetui inimici*; for between them, as with the devils whose subjects they be, and the Christian, there is perpetual hostility." Twenty years ago

¹ D'Costa v. D'Pays, Amb. 228. ² 3 Harvard cxvi. 381.

³ 1 Lord Raymond's reports 282, Wells v. Williams.

⁴ Ramkissensert v. Barker, 1 Atkyns, 51.

⁵ 7 Coke's reports, Calvin's case.

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the law of England required the writer of any periodical publication or pamphlet under sixpence in price to give sureties for £800 against the publication of blasphemy. I was the last person prosecuted in 1868 for non-compliance with that law, which was repealed by Mr. Gladstone in 1869. Up till the 23rd December, 1888, an infidel in Scotland was allowed to enforce any legal claim in court only on condition that, if challenged, he denied his infidelity. If he lied and said he was a Christian, he was accepted, despite his lying. If he told the truth and said he was an unbeliever, then he was practically an outlaw, incompetent to give evidence for himself or for any other. Fortunately all this was changed by the Royal assent to the Oaths Act on 24th December. Has not humanity clearly gained a little in this struggle through unbelief?

For more than a century and a half the Roman Catholic had in practice harsher measure dealt out to him by the English Protestant Christian than was even during that period the fate of the Jew or the unbeliever. If the Roman Catholic would not take the oath of abnegation, which to a sincere Romanist was impossible, he was in effect an outlaw, and the "jury packing" so much complained of to-day in Ireland is one of the habit survivals of the old bad time when Roman Catholics were thus by law excluded from the jury box.

The *Scotsman* of January 5th, 1889, notes that

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in 1860 the Rev. Dr. Robert Lee, of Greyfriars, gave a course of Sunday evening lectures on Biblical Criticism, in which he showed the absurdity and untenableness of regarding every word in the Bible as inspired: and it adds: "We well remember the awful indignation such opinions inspired, and it is refreshing to contrast them with the calmness with which they are now received. Not only from the pulpits of the city, but from the press (misnamed religious) were his doctrines denounced. And one eminent U.P. minister went the length of publicly praying for him, and for the students under his care. It speaks volumes for the progress made since then, when we think in all probability Dr. Charteris, Dr. Lee's successor in the chair, differs in his teaching from the Confession of Faith much more widely than Dr. Lee ever did, and yet he is considered supremely orthodox, whereas the stigma of heresy was attached to the other all his life."

And this change and gain to humanity is due to the gradual progress of unbelief, alike inside and outside the Churches. Take from differing Churches two recent illustrations: The late Principal Dr. Lindsay Alexander, a strict Calvinist, in his important work on "Biblical Theology," claims that "all the statements of Scripture are alike to be deferred to as presenting to us the mind of God." Yet the Rev. Dr. of Divinity also says: "We find in their writings [*i.e.*, in the writings of the sacred authors]

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statements which no ingenuity can reconcile with what modern research has shown to be the scientific truth—*i.e.*, we find in them statements which modern science proves to be erroneous."

At the last Southwell Diocesan Church of England Conference at Derby, the Bishop of the Diocese presiding, the Rev. J. G. Richardson said of the Old Testament that "it was no longer honest or even safe to deny that this noble literature, rich in all the elements of moral or spiritual grandeur, given—so the Church had always taught, and would always teach—under the inspiration of Almighty God, was sometimes mistaken in its science, was sometimes inaccurate in its history, and sometimes only relative and accommodatory in its morality. It assumed theories of the physical world which science had abandoned and could never resume; it contained passages of narrative which devout and temperate men pronounced discredited, both by external and internal evidence; it praised, or justified, or approved, or condoned, or tolerated, conduct which the teaching of Christ and the conscience of the Christian alike condemned."

Or, as I should urge, the gain to humanity by unbelief is that "the teaching of Christ" has been modified, enlarged, widened, and humanized, and that "the conscience of the Christian" is in quantity and quality made fitter for human progress by the ever-increasing additions of knowledge of these later and more heretical days.

A PLEA FOR ATHEISM

THIS essay is issued in the hope that it may succeed in removing some of the many prejudices prevalent, not only against the actual holders of Atheistic opinions, but also against those wrongfully suspected of Atheism. Men who have been famous for depth of thought, for excellent wit, or great genius, have been recklessly assailed as Atheists by those who lack the high qualifications against which the malice of the calumniators was directed. Thus, not only have Voltaire and Paine been, without ground, accused of Atheism, but Bacon, Locke, and Bishop Berkeley himself, have, amongst others, been denounced by thoughtless or unscrupulous pietists as inclining to Atheism, the ground for the accusation being that they manifested an inclination to push human thought a little in advance of the age in which they lived.

It is too often the fashion with persons of pious reputation to speak in unmeasured language of Atheism as favouring immorality, and of Atheists as men whose conduct is necessarily vicious, and who have adopted Atheistic views as a desperate

defiance against a Deity justly offended by the badness of their lives. Such persons urge that amongst the proximate causes of Atheism are vicious training, immoral and profligate companions, licentious living, and the like. Dr. John Pye Smith, in his "Instructions on Christian Theology," goes so far as to declare that "nearly all the Atheists upon record have been men of extremely debauched and vile conduct." Such language from the Christian advocate is not surprising, but there are others who, while professing great desire for the spread of Freethought and having pretensions to rank amongst acute and liberal thinkers, declare Atheism impracticable, and its teachings cold, barren, and negative. Excepting to each of the above allegations, I maintain that thoughtful Atheism affords greater possibility for human happiness than any system yet based on, or possible to be founded on, Theism, and that the lives of true Atheists must be more virtuous—because more human—than those of the believers in Deity, the humanity of the devout believer often finding itself neutralized by a faith with which that humanity is necessarily in constant collision. The devotee piling the faggots at the *auto da fé* of a heretic, and that heretic his son, might notwithstanding be a good father in every other respect (see Deut. xiii. 6-10). Heresy, in the eyes of the believer, is highest criminality, and outweighs all claims of family or affection.

Atheism, properly understood, is no mere disbelief ;

is in no wise a cold, barren negative ; it is, on the contrary, a hearty, fruitful affirmation of all truth, and involves the positive assertion of action of highest humanity.

Let Atheism be fairly examined, and neither condemned—its defence unheard—on the *ex parte* slanders of some of the professional preachers of fashionable orthodoxy, whose courage is bold enough while the pulpit protects the sermon, but whose valour becomes tempered with discretion when a free platform is afforded and discussion claimed ; nor misjudged because it has been the custom to regard Atheism as so unpopular as to render its advocacy impolitic. The best policy against all prejudice is to firmly advocate the truth. The Atheist does not say "There is no God," but he says : "I know not what you mean by God ; I am without idea of God ; the word 'God' is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me. If, however, 'God' is defined to mean an existence other than the existence of which I am a mode, then I deny 'God,' and affirm that it is impossible such 'God' can be. That is, I affirm one existence, and deny that there can be more than one." The Pantheist also affirms one existence, and denies that there can be more than one ;

but the distinction between the Pantheist and the Atheist is, that the Pantheist affirms infinite attributes for existence, while the Atheist maintains that attributes are the characteristics of mode—*i.e.*, the diversities enabling the conditioning in thought.

When the Theist affirms that his God is an existence other than, and separate from, the so-called material universe, and when he invests this separate, hypothetical existence with the several attributes of personality, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity, infinity, immutability, and perfect goodness, then the Atheist in reply says: "I deny the existence of such a being"; and he is entitled to say this because this Theistic definition is self-contradictory, as well as contradictory of every-day experience.

If you speak to the Atheist of God as creator, he answers that the conception of creation is impossible. We are utterly unable to construe it in thought as possible that the complement of existence has been either increased or diminished, much less can we conceive an absolute origination of substance. We cannot conceive either, on the one hand, nothing becoming something, or on the other, something becoming nothing. The words "creation" and "destruction" have no value except as applied to phenomena. You may destroy a gold coin, but you have only destroyed the condition, you have not affected the substance. "Creation" and "destruction" denote change of phenomena; they do

not denote origin or cessation of substance. The Theist who speaks of God creating the universe must either suppose that Deity evolved it out of himself, or that he produced it from nothing. But the Theist cannot regard the universe as evolution of Deity, because this would identify Universe and Deity, and be Pantheism rather than Theism. There would be no distinction of substance—no creation. Nor can the Theist regard the universe as created out of nothing, because Deity is, according to him, necessarily eternal and infinite. God's existence being eternal and infinite precludes the possibility of the conception of vacuum to be filled by the universe if created. No one can even think of any point in extent or duration and say: Here is the point of separation between the creator and the created. It is not possible for the Theist to imagine a beginning to the universe. It is not possible to conceive either an absolute commencement, or an absolute termination of existence; that is, it is impossible to conceive beginning, before which you have a period when the universe has yet to be; or to conceive an end, after which the universe, having been, no longer exists. The Atheist affirms that he cognizes to-day effects; that these are, at the same time, causes and effects—causes to the effects they precede, effects to the causes they follow. Cause is simply everything without which the effect would not result, and with which it must

result. Cause is the means to an end, consummating itself in that end. Cause is the word we use to include all that determines change. The Theist who argues for creation must assert a point of time—that is, of duration, when the created did not yet exist. At this point of time either something existed or nothing; but something must have existed, for out of nothing nothing can come. Something must have existed, because the point fixed upon is that of the duration of something. This something must have been either finite or infinite; if finite it could not have been God, and if the something were infinite, then creation was impossible: it is impossible to add to infinite existence.

If you leave the question of creation, and deal with the government of the universe, the difficulties of Theism are by no means lessened. The existence of evil is then a terrible stumbling-block to the Theist. Pain, misery, crime, poverty confront the advocate of eternal goodness, and challenge with unanswerable potency his declaration of Deity as all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful. A recent writer in the *Spectator* admits that there is what it regards "as the most painful, as it is often the most incurable, form of Atheism—the Atheism arising from a sort of horror of the idea of an Omnipotent Being permitting such a proportion of misery among the majority of his creatures." Evil is either caused by God or exists independently; but it cannot be

caused by God, as in that case he would not be all-good ; nor can it exist hostilely, as in that case he would not be all-powerful. If all-good he would desire to annihilate evil, and continued evil contradicts either God's desire, or God's ability, to prevent it. Evil must either have had a beginning or it must have been eternal ; but, according to the Theist, it cannot be eternal, because God alone is eternal. Nor can it have had a beginning, for if it had it must either have originated in God, or outside God ; but, according to the Theist, it cannot have originated in God, for he is all-good, and out of all-goodness evil cannot originate ; nor can evil have originated outside God, for, according to the Theist, God is infinite, and it is impossible to go outside of or beyond infinity.

To the Atheist this question of evil assumes an entirely different aspect. He declares that each evil is a result, but not a result from God nor Devil. He affirms that conduct founded on knowledge of the laws of existence may ameliorate each present form of evil, and, as our knowledge increases, prevent its future recurrence.

Some declare that the belief in God is necessary as a check to crime. They allege that the Atheist may commit murder, lie, or steal without fear of any consequences. To try the actual value of this argument, it is not unfair to ask : Do Theists ever steal ? If yes, then in each such theft the belief

in God and his power to punish has been insufficient as a preventive of the crime. Do Theists ever lie or murder? If yes, the same remark has again force—Theism failing against the lesser as against the greater crime. Those who use such an argument overlook that all men seek happiness, though in very diverse fashions. Ignorant and miseducated men often mistake the true path to happiness, and commit crime in the endeavour to obtain it. Atheists hold that by teaching mankind the real road to human happiness it is possible to keep them from the by-ways of criminality and error. Atheists would teach men to be moral now, not because God offers as an inducement reward by and by, but because in the virtuous act itself immediate good is ensured to the doer and the circle surrounding him. Atheism would preserve man from lying, stealing, murdering, not from fear of an eternal agony after death, but because these crimes make this life itself a course of misery.

While Theism, asserting God as the creator and governor of the universe, hinders and checks man's efforts by declaring God's will to be the sole directing and controlling power, Atheism, by declaring all events to be in accordance with natural laws—that is, happening in certain ascertainable sequences—stimulates man to discover the best conditions of life, and offers him the most powerful inducements to morality. While the Theist provides future happi-

ness for a scoundrel repentant on his death-bed, Atheism affirms present and certain happiness for the man who does his best to live here so well as to have little cause for repenting hereafter.

Theism declares that God dispenses health and inflicts disease, and sickness and illness are regarded by the Theists as visitations from an angered Deity, to be borne with meekness and content. Atheism declares that physiological knowledge may preserve us from disease by preventing us from infringing the law of health, and that sickness results not as the ordinance of offended Deity, but from ill-ventilated dwellings and workshops, bad and insufficient food, excessive toil, mental suffering, exposure to inclement weather, and the like—all these finding root in poverty, the chief source of crime and disease; that prayers and piety afford no protection against fever, and that if the human being be kept without food he will starve as quickly whether he be Theist or Atheist, theology being no substitute for bread.

It is very important, in order that injustice may not be done to the Theistic argument, that we should have—in lieu of a clear definition, which it seems useless to ask for—the best possible clue to the meaning intended to be conveyed by the word "God." If it were not that the word is an arbitrary term, maintained for the purpose of influencing the ignorant, and the notions suggested by which are vague and entirely contingent upon individual fancies, such a

clue could probably be most easily and satisfactorily obtained by tracing back the word "God," and ascertaining the sense in which it was used by the uneducated worshippers who have gone before us, and collating this with the more modern Theism, qualified as it is by the superior knowledge of to-day. Dupuis says: "Le mot *Dieu* paraît destiné à exprimer l'idée de la force universelle et éternellement active qui imprime le mouvement à tout dans la Nature, suivant les lois d'une harmonie constante et admirable, qui se développe dans les diverses formes que prend la matière organisée, qui se mêle à tout, anime tout, et qui semble être une dans ses modifications infiniment variées, et n'appartenir qu'à elle-même." "The word God appears intended to express the universal and eternally active force which endows all nature with motion according to the laws of a constant and admirable harmony; which develops itself in the diverse forms of organized matter, which mingles with all, gives life to all; which seems to be one through all its infinitely varied modifications, and inheres in itself alone."

In the "Bon Sens" of Curé Meslier, it is asked: "Qu'est-ce que Dieu?" and the answer is: "C'est un mot abstrait fait pour désigner la force cachée de la nature; ou c'est un point mathématique qui n'a ni longueur, ni largeur, ni profondeur." "It is an abstract word coined to designate the hidden

force of nature ; or it is a mathematical point having neither length, breadth, nor depth."

The orthodox fringe of the Theism of to-day is Hebraistic in its origin—that is, it finds its root in the superstition and ignorance of a petty and barbarous people nearly destitute of literature, poor in language, and almost entirely wanting in high conceptions of humanity. It might, as Judaism is the foundation of Christianity, be fairly expected that the ancient Jewish records would aid us in our search after the meaning to be attached to the word "God." The most prominent words in Hebrew rendered God or Lord in English are יהוה *Ieue*, and אלהים *Alcim*. The first word *Ieue*, called by our orthodox Jehovah, is equivalent to "that which exists," and indeed embodies in itself the only possible trinity in unity—i.e., past, present, and future. There is nothing in this Hebrew word to help us to any such definition as is required for the sustenance of modern Theism. The most we can make of it by any stretch of imagination is equivalent to the declaration "I am, I have been, I shall be." The word יהוה is hardly ever spoken by the religious Jews, who actually in reading substitute for it, Adonai, an entirely different word. Dr. Wall notices the close resemblance in sound between the word *Iehowa* or *Ieue*, or Jehovah and Jove. In fact *Ζεύς πατήρ*, Jupiter and *Ieue-pater* (God the father) present still closer resemblance in sound. Jove is also *Ζεύς* or *Θεός* or

Δεός, whence the word Deus and our Deity. The Greek mythology, far more ancient than that of the Hebrews, has probably found for Christianity many other and more important features of coincidence than that of a similarly sounding name. The word Θεός, traced back, affords us no help beyond that it identifies Deity with the universe. Plato says that the early Greeks thought that the only Gods (Θεοὶ) were the sun, moon, earth, stars, and heaven. The word אֱלֹהִים, Aleim, assists us still less in defining the word God, for Parkhurst translates it as a plural noun signifying "the curser," deriving it from the verb אָלַח (Ale), *to curse*. Dr. Colenso has collected for us a store of traditional meanings for the IAO of the Greek, and the יְהוָה of the Hebrew; but, though these are interesting to the student of mythology, they give no help to the Theistic demonstrator. Finding that philology aids us but little, we must endeavour to arrive at the meaning of the word "God" by another rule. It is utterly impossible to fix the period of the rise of Theism amongst any particular people; but it is, notwithstanding, comparatively easy, if not to trace out the development of Theistic ideas, at any rate to point to their probable course of growth amongst all peoples.

Keightley, in his "Origin of Mythology," says: "Supposing, for the sake of hypothesis, a race of men in a state of total or partial ignorance of Deity, their belief in many Gods may have thus commenced:

- They saw around them various changes brought about by human agency, and hence they knew the power of intelligence to produce effects. When they beheld other and greater effects, they ascribed them to some unseen being, similar but superior to man." They associated particular events with special unknown beings (Gods), to each of whom they ascribed either a peculiarity of power, or a sphere of action not common to other Gods. Thus,
- one was God of the sea, another God of war, another God of love, another ruled the thunder and lightning; and thus through the various then known elements of the universe, and the passions of mankind.

This mythology became modified with the commencement of human knowledge. The ability to think has proved itself oppugnant to, and destructive of, the reckless desire to worship, characteristic of semi-barbarism. Science has razed altar after altar heretofore erected to the unknown Gods, and has pulled down Deity after Deity from the pedestals on which ignorance and superstition had erected them. The priest, who had formerly spoken as the oracle of God, lost his sway just in proportion as the scientific teacher succeeded in impressing mankind with a knowledge of the facts around them. The ignorant, who had hitherto listened unquestioning during centuries of abject submission to their spiritual preceptors, at last commenced to search and examine

for themselves, and were guided by experience rather than by church doctrine. To-day advancing intellect challenges the reserve guard of the old armies of superstition, and compels a conflict in which mankind must in the end have great gain by the forced enunciation of the truth.

From the word "God" the Theist derives no argument in his favour; it teaches nothing, defines nothing, demonstrates nothing, explains nothing. The Theist answers that this is no sufficient objection; that there are many words which are in common use to which the same objection applies. Even if this were true, it does not answer the Atheist's objection. Alleging a difficulty on the one side is not a removal of the obstacle already pointed out on the other.

The Theist declares his God to be not only immutable, but also infinitely intelligent, and says: "Matter is either essentially intelligent or essentially non-intelligent; if matter were essentially intelligent, no matter could be without intelligence; but matter cannot be essentially intelligent, because some matter is not intelligent, therefore matter is essentially non-intelligent; but there is intelligence, therefore there must be a cause for the intelligence, independent of matter—this must be an intelligent being—*i.e.*, God." The Atheist answers: I do not know what is meant, in the mouth of the Theist, by "matter." "Matter," "nature," "substance," "existence," are words having the same signification in the Athe-

ist's vocabulary. Lewes used "matter" as the "symbol of all the known properties, statical and dynamical, passive and active; *i.e.*, subjectively, as feeling and change of feeling, or objectively, as agent and action"; and Mill defined "nature" as "the sum of all phenomena, together with the causes which produce them, including not only all that happens, but all that is capable of happening." It is not certain that the Theist expresses any very clear idea to himself when he uses the words "matter" and "intelligence"; it is quite certain that he has not yet shown himself capable of communicating this idea, and that any effort he makes is couched in terms which are self-contradictory. Reason and understanding are sometimes treated as separate faculties, yet it is not unfair to presume that the Theist would include them both under the word intelligence. Perception is the foundation of the intellect. The perceptive ability differs in each animal; yet, in speaking of matter, the Theist uses the word "intelligence" as though the same meaning were to be understood in every case. The recollection of the perceptions is the exercise of a different ability from the perceptive ability, and occasionally varies disproportionately; thus, an individual may have great perceptive abilities, and very little memory, or the reverse; yet memory, as well as perception, is included in intelligence. So also the comparing between two or more perceptions; the judging and

the reflecting ; all these are subject to the same remarks, and all these and other phases of the mind are included in the word intelligence. We answer, then, that " God " (whatever that word may mean) cannot be intelligent. He can never perceive ; the act of perception results in the obtaining a new idea, but if God be omniscient, his ideas have been eternally the same. He has either been always, and always will be, perceiving, or he has never perceived at all. But God cannot have been always perceiving, because, if he had, he would always have been obtaining fresh knowledge, in which case he must at some time have had less knowledge than now ; that is, he would have been less perfect ; that is, he would not have been God. He can never recollect nor forget ; he can never compare, reflect, nor judge. There cannot be perfect intelligence without understanding ; but following Coleridge, " understanding is the faculty of judging according to sense." The faculty of whom ? Of some person, judging according to that person's senses. But has " God " senses ? Is there anything beyond " God " for God to sensate ? There cannot be perfect intelligence without reason. By reason we mean that phase of the mind which avails itself of past and present experience to predicate more or less accurately of possible experience in the future. To God there can be neither past nor future, therefore to him reason is impossible. There cannot be perfect

intelligence without will; but has God will? If God wills, the will of the all-powerful must be irresistible; the will of the infinite must exclude all other wills.

God can never perceive. Perception and sensation are identical. Every sensation is pleasurable or painful. But God, if immutable, can neither be pleased nor pained. Every fresh sensation involves a change in mental and perhaps in physical condition. God, if immutable, cannot change. Sensation is the source of all ideas, but it is only objects external to the mind which can be sensed. If God be infinite there can be no objects external to him, and therefore sensation must be to him impossible. Yet without perception where is intelligence?

God cannot have memory nor reason—memory is of the past, reason for the future, but to God immutable there can be no past, no future. The words past, present, and future imply change: they assert progression of duration. If God be immutable, to him change is impossible. Can you have intelligence destitute of perception, memory, and reason? God cannot have the faculty of judgment—judgment implies in the act of judging a conjoining or disjoining of two or more thoughts, but this involves change of mental condition. To God the immutable, change is impossible. Can you have intelligence, yet no perception, no memory, no reason, no judgment? God cannot think. The law of the think-

able is, that the thing thought must be separated from the thing which is not thought. To think otherwise would be to think of nothing—to have an impression with no distinguishing mark would be to have no impression. Yet this separation implies change, and to God, immutable, change is impossible. In memory, the thing remembered is distinguished from the thing temporarily or permanently forgotten. Can God forget? Can you have intelligence without thought? If the Theist replies to this, that he does not mean by infinite intelligence, as an attribute of Deity, an affinity of the intelligence found in a finite degree in humankind, then he is bound to explain, clearly and distinctly, what other “intelligence” he means; and until this be done the foregoing statements require answer.

The Atheist does not regard “substance” as either essentially intelligent or the reverse. Intelligence is the result of certain conditions of existence. Burnished steel is bright—that is, brightness is the characteristic of a certain condition of existence. Alter the condition, and the characteristic of the condition no longer exists. The only essential of substance is existence. Alter the wording of the Theist’s objection:—Matter is either essentially bright, or essentially non-bright. If matter were essentially bright, brightness should be the essence of all matter; but matter cannot be essentially bright, because some matter is not bright, therefore matter is essen-

tially non-bright ; but there is brightness * therefore there must be a cause for this brightness independent of matter—that is, there must be an essentially bright being—i.e., God.

Another Theistic proposition is thus stated : " Every effect must have a cause ; the first cause universal must be eternal : *ergo*, the first cause universal must be God " This is equivalent to saying that " God " is " first cause. " But what is to be understood by cause ? Defined in the absolute, the word has no real value. " Cause, " therefore, cannot be eternal. What can be understood by " first cause " ? To us the two words convey no meaning greater than would be conveyed by the phrase " round triangle. " Cause and effect are correlative terms—each cause is the effect of some precedent ; each effect the cause of its consequent. It is impossible to conceive existence terminated by a primal or initial cause. The " beginning, " as it is phrased, of the universe is not thought out by the Theist, but conceded without thought. To adopt the language of Montaigne : " Men make themselves believe that they believe. " The so-called belief in Creation is nothing more than the prostration of the intellect on the threshold of the unknown. We can only cognize the ever-succeeding phenomena of existence as a line in continuous and eternal evolution. This line has to us no beginning ; we trace it back into the misty regions of the past but

a little way, and however far we may be able to journey there is still the great beyond. Then what is meant by "universal cause"? Spinoza gives the following definition of cause, as used in its absolute signification: "By cause of itself I understand that, the essence of which involves existence, or that, the nature of which can only be considered as existent." That is, Spinoza treats "cause" absolute and "existence" as two words having the same meaning. If this mode of defining the word be contested, then it has no meaning other than its relative signification of a means to an end. "Every effect must have a cause." Every effect implies the plurality of effects, and necessarily that each effect must be finite; but how is it possible from finite effect to logically deduce a universal—i.e., infinite cause?

There are two modes of argument presented by Theists, and by which, separately or combined, they seek to demonstrate the being of a God. These are familiarly known as the arguments *a priori* and *a posteriori*.

The *a posteriori* argument has been popularized in England by Paley, who has ably endeavoured to hide the weakness of his demonstration under an abundance of irrelevant illustrations. The reasoning of Paley is very deficient in the essential points where it most needed strength. It is utterly impossible to prove by it the eternity or infinity of Deity. As

an argument founded on analogy, the design argument, at the best, could only entitle its propounder to infer the existence of a finite cause, or rather of a multitude of finite causes. It ought not to be forgotten that the illustrations of the eye, the watch, and the man, even if admitted as instances of design, or rather of adaptation, are instances of eyes, watches, and men, designed or adapted out of pre-existing substance, by a being of the same kind of substance, and afford, therefore, no demonstration in favour of a designer alleged to have actually created substance out of nothing, and also alleged to have created a substance entirely different from himself.

The illustrations of alleged adaptation or design in animal life in its embryonic stages are thus dealt with by the late George Henry Lewes: "What rational interpretation can be given to the succession of phases each embryo is forced to pass through? None of these phases has any adaptation to the future state of the animal; they are in positive contradiction to it, or are simply purposeless; many of them have no adaptation, even in its embryonic state. What does the fact imply? There is not a single known organism which is not developed out of simpler forms. Before it can attain the complex structure which distinguishes it, there must be an evolution of forms which distinguish the structures of organisms lower in the series. On the hypothesis of a plan which pre-arranged the organic world,

nothing could be more unworthy of a supreme intelligence than this inability to construct an organism at once, without making several tentative efforts, undoing to-day what was so carefully done yesterday, and repeating for centuries the same tentatives and the same corrections in the same succession. Do not let us blink this consideration. There is a traditional phrase which is in vogue amongst Anthropomorphists—a phrase which has become a sort of argument—‘the Great Architect.’ But if we were to admit the human point of view, a glance at the facts of embryology must produce very uncomfortable reflexions. For what shall we say to an architect who was unable— or, being able, was obstinately unwilling—to erect a palace, except by first using his materials in the shape of a hut, then pulling them down and rebuilding them as a cottage, then adding storey to storey, and room to room, not with any reference to the ultimate purposes of a palace, but wholly with reference to the way in which houses were constructed in ancient times? Would there be a chorus of applause from the Institute of Architects, and favourable notices in newspapers of this profound wisdom? Yet this is the sort of succession on which organisms are constructed. The fact has long been familiar; how has it been reconciled with infinite wisdom?”

The *à posteriori* argument can never demonstrate infinity for Deity. Arguing from an effect finite in

extent, the most it could afford would be a cause sufficient for that effect, such cause being possibly finite in extent and duration. Professor Flint in his late work in advocacy of Theism concedes that "we cannot deduce the infinite from the finite." And as the argument does not demonstrate God's infinity, neither can it, for the same reason, make out his omniscience, as it is clearly impossible to logically claim infinite wisdom for a God possibly only finite. God's omnipotence remains unproved for the same reason, and because it is clearly absurd to argue that God exercises power where he may not be. Nor can the *a posteriori* argument show God's absolute freedom, for as it does nothing more than seek to prove a finite God, it is quite consistent with the argument that God's existence is limited and controlled in a thousand ways. Nor does this argument show that God always existed; at the best, the proof is only that some cause, enough for the effect, existed before it, but there is no evidence that this cause differs from any other causes, which are often as transient as the effect itself. And as it does not demonstrate that God has always existed, neither does it demonstrate that he will always exist, or even that he now exists. It is perfectly in accordance with the argument, and with the analogy of cause and effect, that the effect may remain after the cause has ceased to exist. Nor does the argument from design demonstrate one God. It is quite

consistent with this argument that a separate cause existed for each effect, or mark of design discovered, or that several causes contributed to some or one of such effects. So that if the argument be true, it might result in a multitude of petty Deities, limited in knowledge, extent, duration, and power; and still worse, each one of this multitude of Gods may have had a cause which would also be finite in extent and duration, and would require another, and so on, until the design argument loses the reasoner amongst an innumerable crowd of Deities, none of whom can have the attributes claimed for God.

The design argument is defective as an argument from analogy, because it seeks to prove a Creator God who designed, but does not explain whether this God has been eternally designing, which would be absurd; or, if he at some time commenced to design, what then induced him so to commence? It is illogical, for it seeks to prove an immutable Deity, by demonstrating a mutation on the part of Deity.

It is unnecessary to deal specially with each of the many writers who have used from different stand-points the *à posteriori* form of argument in order to prove the existence of Deity. The objections already stated apply to the whole class; and, although probably each illustration used by the Theistic advocate is capable of an elucidation entirely at variance with his argument, the main features of objection are the same. The argument *à posteriori*

is a method of proof in which the premises are composed of some position of existing facts, and the conclusion asserts a position antecedent to those facts. The argument is from given effects to their causes. It is one form of this argument which asserts that a man has a moral nature, and from this seeks to deduce the existence of a moral governor. This form has the disadvantage that its premises are illusory. In alleging a moral nature for man, the Theist overlooks the fact that the moral nature of man differs somewhat in each individual, differs considerably in each nation, and differs entirely in some peoples. It is dependent on organization and education; these are influenced by climate, food, and mode of life. If the argument from man's nature could demonstrate anything, it would prove a murdering God for the murderer, a lascivious God for the licentious man, a dishonest God for the thief, and so through the various phases of human inclination. The *a priori* arguments are methods of proof in which the matter of the premises exists in the order of conception antecedently to that of the conclusion. The argument is from cause to effect. Amongst the prominent Theistic advocates relying upon the *a priori* argument in England are Dr. Samuel Clarke, the Rev. Moses Lowman, and William Gillespie.

An important contribution to Theistic literature has been the publication of the Baird lectures on Theism. The lectures are by Professor Flint, who asks: "Have

- we sufficient evidence for thinking that there is a self-existent, eternal being, infinite in power and wisdom, and perfect in holiness and goodness, the Maker of heaven and earth ? ”
- “ Theism,” he affirms, “ is the doctrine that the universe owes its existence, and continuance in existence, to the reason and will of a self-existent Being, who is infinitely powerful, wise, and good.
- It is the doctrine that nature has a Creator and Preserver, the nations a Governor, men a heavenly Father and Judge.” But he concedes that “ Theism is very far from co-extensive with religion. Religion is spread over the whole earth ; Theism only over a comparatively small portion of it. There are but three Theistic religions—the Mosaic, the Christian, and the Muhammadan. They are connected historically in the closest manner—the idea of God having been transmitted to the two latter, and not independently originated by them. All other religions are Polytheistic or Pantheistic, or both together. Among those who have been educated in any of these heathen religions, only a few minds of rare penetration and power have been able to rise by their own exertions to a consistent Theistic belief. The God of all those among us who believe in God, even of those who reject Christianity, who reject
- all revelation, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From these ancient Jewish fathers the knowledge of him has historically descended through

an unbroken succession of generations to us. We have inherited it from them. If it had not thus come down to us, if we had not been born into a society pervaded by it, there is no reason to suppose that we should have found it out for ourselves, and still less that we should merely have required to open our eyes in order to see it."

If "Theism is the doctrine that the universe owes its existence to the reason and will of a self-existing Being who is infinitely powerful, wise, and good," then it is a doctrine which involves many difficulties and absurdities. It assumes that the universe has not always existed. The new existence added when the universe was originated was either an improvement or a deterioration on what had always existed; or it was in all respects precisely identical with what had therefore always existed. In the first, if the new universe was an improvement, then the previously self-existent being could not have been infinitely good. If the universe was a deterioration, then the creator could have scarcely been all-wise, or he could not have been all-powerful. If the universe was in all respects precisely identical with the self-existent being, then it must have been infinitely powerful, wise and good, and must have been self-existent. Any of the alternatives is fatal to Theism. Again, if the universe owes its existence to God's reason and will, God must, prior to creation, have thought upon the matter until he

ultimately determined to create ; but, if the creation were wise and good, it would never have been delayed while the infinitely wise and good reasoned about it, and, if the creation were not wise and good, the infinitely wise and good would never have commenced it. Either God willed without motive, or he was influenced ; if he reasoned, there was—prior to the definite willing—a period of doubt or suspended judgment, all of which is inconsistent with the attributes claimed for deity by Professor Flint. It is hard to understand how whole nations can have been left by their infinitely powerful, wise, and good governor—how many men can have been left by their infinitely powerful, wise, and good father—without any knowledge of himself. Yet this must be so if, as Professor Flint conceives, Theism is spread over only a comparatively small portion of the earth. The moral effect of Christian and Muhammadan Theism on the nations influenced was well shown in the recent Russo-Turkish War.

Every Theist must admit that, if a God exists, he could have so convinced all men of the fact of his existence that doubt, disagreement, or disbelief would be impossible. If he could not do this, he would not be omnipotent, or he would not be omniscient—that is, he would not be God. Every Theist must also agree that, if a God exists, he would wish all men to have such a clear consciousness of his existence and attributes, that doubt, disagreement,

or disbelief on this subject would be impossible. And this, if for no other reason, because that out of doubts and disagreements on religion have too often resulted centuries of persecution, strife, and misery, which a good God would desire to prevent. If God would not desire this, then he is not all good—that is, he is not God. But as many men have doubts, as a large majority of mankind have disagreements, and as some men have disbelief as to God's existence and attributes, it must follow that God does not exist, or that he is not all-wise, or that he is not all-powerful, or that he is not all-good.

Many Theists rely on the intuitional argument. It is, perhaps, best to allow the Baird Lecturer to reply to these: "Man, say some, knows God by immediate intuition, he needs no argument for his existence, because he perceives Him directly—face to face—without any medium. It is easy to assert this, but obviously the assertion is the merest dogmatism. Not one man in a thousand who understands what he is affirming will dare to claim to have an immediate vision of God, and nothing can be more likely than that the man who makes such a claim is self-deluded." And Professor Flint urges that "What seem intuitions are often really inferences, and not unfrequently erroneous inferences; what seem the immediate dictates of pure reason, or the direct and unclouded perceptions of a special spiritual faculty, may be the conceits of fancy, or the

products of habits and association, or the reflexions of strong feeling. A man must prove to himself, and he must prove to others, that what he takes to be an intuition is an intuition. Is that proof in this case likely to be easier or more conclusive than the proof of the Divine existence? The so-called immediate perception of God must be shown to be a perception and to be immediate; it must be vindicated and verified; and how this is to be done, especially if there be no other reasons for believing in God than itself, it is difficult to conceive. The history of religion, which is what ought to yield the clearest confirmation of the alleged intuition, appears to be from beginning to end a conspicuous contradiction of it. If all men have the spiritual power of directly beholding their Creator—have an immediate vision of God—how happens it that whole nations believe in the most absurd and monstrous Gods? That millions of men are ignorant whether there be one God or thousands? " And still more strongly he adds: "The opinion that man has an intuition or immediate perception of God is untenable: the opinion that he has an immediate feeling of God is absurd."

Every child is born into the world an Atheist, and, if he grows into a Theist, his Deity differs with the country in which the believer may happen to be born, or the people amongst whom he may happen to be educated. The belief is the result of education

or organization. This is practically conceded by Professor Flint, where he speaks of the God-idea as transmitted from the Jews, and says: "We have inherited it from them. If it had not come down to us, if we had not been born into a society pervaded by it, there is no reason to suppose that we should have found it out for ourselves." And, further, he maintains that a child is born "into blank ignorance, and, if left entirely to itself, would, probably, never find out as much religious truth as the most ignorant of parents can teach it." Religious belief is powerful in proportion to the want of scientific knowledge on the part of the believer. The more ignorant the more credulous. In the mind of the Theist "God" is equivalent to the sphere of the unknown; by the use of the word he answers, without thought, problems which might otherwise obtain scientific solution. The more ignorant the Theist, the more numerous his Gods. Belief in God is not a faith founded on reason. Theism is worse than illogical; its teachings are not only without utility, but of itself it has nothing to teach. Separated from Christianity with its almost innumerable sects, from Muhammadanism with its numerous divisions, and separated also from every other preached system, Theism is a Will-o'-the-Wisp, without reality. Apart from orthodoxy, Theism is the veriest dreamform, without substance or coherence.

What does Christian Theism teach? That the first

man, made perfect by the all-powerful, all-wise, all-good God, was nevertheless imperfect, and by his imperfection brought misery into the world, where the all-good God must have intended misery should never come ; that this God made men to share this misery—men whose fault was their being what he made them ; that this God begets a son, who is nevertheless his unbegotten self, and that by belief in the birth of God's eternal son, and in the death of the undying who died as sacrifice to God's vengeance, men may escape the consequences of the first man's error. Christian Theism declares that belief alone can save men, and yet recognizes the fact that man's belief results from teaching, by establishing missionary societies to spread the faith. Christian Theism teaches that God, though no respecter of persons, selected as his favourite one nation in preference to all others ; that man can do no good of himself or without God's aid, but yet that each man has a free will ; that God is all-powerful, but that few go to heaven, and the majority to hell ; that all are to love God, who has predestined from eternity that by far the largest number of human beings are to be burning in hell for ever. Yet the advocates for Theism venture to upbraid those who argue against such a faith.

Either Theism is true or false. If true, discussion must help to spread its influence ; if false, the sooner it ceases to influence human conduct the better for

human kind. This Plea for Atheism is put forth as a challenge to Theists to do battle for their cause, and in the hope that, the strugglers being sincere, truth may give laurels to the victor and the vanquished; laurels to the victor, in that he has upheld the truth; laurels which should be even more welcome to the vanquished, whose defeat crowns him with a truth he knew not of before.

APPENDIX

A few years ago a Nonconformist minister invited me to debate the question, "Is Atheism the True Doctrine of the Universe?" and the following was in substance my opening statement of the argument, which for some reason, although many letters passed, was never replied to by my reverend opponent.

"By Atheism I mean the affirmation of one existence, of which existence I know only one mode; each mode being distinguished in thought by its qualities. This affirmation is a positive, not a negative, affirmation, and is properly describable as Atheism because it does not include in it any possibility of *Theos*. It is, being without God, distinctly an Atheistic affirmation. This Atheism affirms that the Atheist knows only qualities, and only knows these qualities as the characteristics of modes. By 'existence' I mean the totality of phenomena and all that has been, is, or may be necessary for the happening of any and every phenomenon. By 'mode' I mean each cognized condition (phenomenon or

aggregation of phenomena). By 'quality' I mean that characteristic, or each of those characteristics, by which in thought I distinguish that which I think. The word 'universe' is with me an equivalent for 'existence.'

" Either Atheism or Theism must be the true doctrine of the Universe. I assume here that no other theory is thinkable. Theism is either Pantheism, Polytheism, or Monotheism. There is, I submit, no other conceivable category. Pantheism affirms one existence, but declares that some qualities are infinite—*e.g.*, that existence is intelligent. Atheism only affirms qualities for phenomena. We know each phenomenon by its qualities; we know no qualities except as qualities of some phenomenon. By infinite I mean illimitable. Phenomena are, of course, finite. By intelligent I mean able to think. Polytheism affirms several Theistic existences—this affirmation being nearly self-contradictory—and so usually affirms at least one non-theistic existence. Monotheism affirms at least two existences: that is, the Theos and that which the Theos has created and rules. Atheism denies alike the reasonableness of Polytheism, Pantheism, and Monotheism. Any affirmation of more than one existence is on the face of the affirmation an absolute self-contradiction, if infinity be pretended for either of the existences affirmed. The word 'Theos' or 'God' has for me no meaning. I am obliged, therefore, to try to collect its meaning as expressed by Theists, who, however, do not seem to me to be either clear or agreed as to the words by which their Theism may be best expressed. For the purpose of this argument I take Monotheism to be the doctrine 'that the universe owes its existence and continuance in existence to the wisdom and will of a supreme, self-existent, eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, righteous, and benevolent personal being,

who is distinct from and independent of what he has created.' By wisdom and will I mean that which I should mean using the same words of any animal able to perceive, remember, reflect, judge, and determine, and active in that ability or those abilities. By supreme I mean highest in any relation of comparison. By self-existent I mean that the conception of which, if it be conceivable, does not involve the conception of antecedent or consequent. By eternal and infinite I mean illimitable in duration and extent. By 'omnipotent' I mean supreme in power over everything. By omniscient, knowing everything. By 'righteous and benevolent' I mean that which the best educated opinion would mean when applying those words to human beings. This doctrine of Monotheism appears to me to be flatly contradicted by the phenomena we know. It is inconsistent with that observed uniformity of happening usually described as law of nature. By law of nature I mean observed order of event. The word 'nature' is another equivalent for the word universe or existence. By uniformity of happening I mean that, given certain conditions, certain results always ensue—vary the conditions, the results vary. I do not attack specially either the Polytheistic, Pantheistic, or Monotheistic presentments of Theism. To me any pretence of Theism seems impossible if Monism be conceded, and, therefore, at present, I rest content in affirming one existence. If Monism be true, and Atheism be Monism, then Atheism is necessarily the true theory of the universe. I submit that 'there cannot be more than one ultimate explanation' of the universe. That any 'tracing back to two or more' existences is illogical, and that as it is only by 'reaching unity' that we can have a reasonable conclusion, it is necessary 'that every form of Dualism should be rejected as a theory of the

universe.' If every form of Dualism be rejected, Monism—*i.e.*, Atheism—alone remains, and is therefore the true and only doctrine of the universe."

Speaking of the prevalence of what he describes as "a form of agnosticism," the editor of the *Spectator* writes: "We think we see signs of a disposition to declare that the great problem is insoluble, that whatever rules, be it a mind or only a force, he or it does not intend the truth to be known, if there is a truth, and to go on, both in action and speculation, as if the problem had no existence. That is the condition of mind, we know, of many of the cultivated who are not sceptics, nor doubters, nor inquirers, but who think they are as certain of their point as they are that the circle will not be squared. They are, they think, in the presence of a recurring decimal, and they are not going to spend life in the effort to resolve it. If no God exists, they will save their time; and if he does exist, he must have set up the impenetrable wall. A distinct belief of that kind, not a vague, pulpy impression, but a formulated belief, exists, we know, in the most unsuspected places, its holders not unfrequently professing Christianity, as at all events the best of the illusions; and it has sunk very far down in the ladder of society. We find it catch classes which have suddenly become aware that there is a serious doubt afloat and have caught something of its extent and force, till they fancy they have in the doubt a revelation as certainly true as they once thought the old certainty." Surely an active, honest Atheism is to be preferred to the state of mind described in the latter part of the passage we have just quoted.

WHO WAS JESUS CHRIST, AND WHAT DID HE TEACH?

I

WHO WAS JESUS CHRIST?

MANY persons will consider the question one to which the Gospels give a sufficient answer and that no further inquiry is necessary. But while the general Christian body affirm that Jesus was God incarnate on earth, the Unitarian Christians, less in numerical strength but numbering a large proportion of the more intelligent and humane, absolutely deny his divinity; the Jews, of whom he is alleged to have been one, do not believe in him at all; and the enormous majority of the inhabitants of the earth have never accepted the Gospels. Even in the earliest ages of the Christian Church heretics were found, amongst Christians themselves, who denied that Jesus had ever existed in the flesh. Under these circumstances the most pious should concede that it is well to prosecute the inquiry to the uttermost, that their faith may rest on sure foundations. The history of Jesus Christ is con-

tained in four books or gospels; outside these it cannot be pretended that there is any reliable narrative of his life. We know not with any certainty, and have now no means of knowing, when, where, or by whom these Gospels were written. The name at the head of each Gospel affords no clue to the real writer. Before A.D. 160 no author mentions any Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and there is no sufficient evidence to identify the Gospels we have with even the writings to which Irenæus refers towards the close of the second century. The Church has provided us with an author for each Gospel, and some early Fathers have argued that there ought to be four Gospels, because there are four seasons, four principal points to the compass, and four corners to the earth. Bolder speculators affirm twelve apostles because there are twelve signs of the Zodiac. With regard to the Gospel first in order, divines disagree as to the language in which it was written. Some allege that the original was in Hebrew, others deny that our Greek version has any of the characters of a translation.

We neither know the hour, nor day, nor month, nor year of Jesus's birth; divines generally agree that he was not born on Christmas Day, and yet on that day the anniversary of his birth is observed. The Oxford Chronology places the matter in no clearer light, and more than thirty learned authorities give a period of over seven years' difference in their

reckoning. The place of his birth is also uncertain. The Jews, in the presence of Jesus, reproached him that he ought to have been born at Bethlehem, and he never replied "I was born there" (John vii. 41, 42, 52).

Jesus was the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt. i.), from whom his descent is traced through Isaac—born of Sarai (whom the writer of the epistle to Galatians [iv. 24] says was a covenant and not a woman)—and ultimately through Joseph, who was not only not his father, but is not shown to have had any kind of relationship to him, and through whom therefore the genealogy should not be traced. There are two genealogies in the Gospels which contradict each other, and these in part may be collated with the Old Testament genealogy, which differs from both. The genealogy of Matthew is self-contradictory, counts thirteen names as fourteen, and omits the names of three kings. Matthew says Abiud was the son of Zorobabel (i. 13). Luke says Zorobabel's son was Rhesa (iii. 27). The Old Testament contradicts both, and gives Meshullam and Hananiah, and Shelomith, their sister (1 Chron. iii. 19), as the names of Zorobabel's children. The reputed father of Jesus, Joseph, had two fathers, one named Jacob, the other Heli. The divines suggest that Heli was the father of Mary, by reading the word "Mary" in Luke iii. 23, in lieu of "Joseph," and the word "daughter" in lieu of "son," thus

correcting the evident blunder made by inspiration. The birth of Jesus was miraculously announced to Mary and to Joseph by visits of an angel, but they so little regarded the miraculous annunciation that they marvelled soon after at much less wonderful things spoken by Simeon.

Jesus was the son of God, or God manifest in the flesh, and his birth was first discovered by some wise men or astrologers, a class described in the Bible as an abomination in God's sight. These men saw *his* star in the East, but it did not tell them much, for they were apparently obliged to ask information from Herod the King. Herod in turn inquired of the chief priests and scribes ; and it is evident Jeremiah was right if he said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means," for these chief priests either misread the prophets or misquoted the Scripture, which is claimed to be a revelation from God, and invented a false prophecy (Matt. ii. 5, 6 ; cf. Micah v. 2) by omitting a few words from, and adding a few words to, a text until it suited their purpose. The star—after the wise men knew where to go, and no longer required its aid—led and went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. This story will be better understood if the reader will walk out some clear night, notice a star, and then try to fix the one house it will be exactly over. The writer of the Third Gospel, silent on the star story, speaks

of an angel who tells some shepherds of the miraculous ; but this does not appear to have happened in the reign of Herod.

After the wise men had left Jesus an angel warned Joseph to flee with Jesus and Mary into Egypt ; and Joseph did fly, and remained there with the young child and his mother until the death of Herod ; and th's it is alleged was done to fulfil a prophecy. The words (Hos. xi. 1) are not prophetic and have no reference whatever to Jesus. The Jesus of the Third Gospel never went into Egypt at all in his childhood.

When Jesus began to be about thirty years of age he was baptized by John in the River Jordan. John, who knew him, according to the First Gospel, forbade him directly he saw him ; but, according to the Fourth Gospel, he knew him not, and had, therefore, no occasion to forbid him. God is an "invisible spirit," whom no man hath seen (John i. 18) or can see (Exod. xxxiii. 20) ; but the man John saw the spirit of God descending like a dove. God is everywhere, but at that time was in heaven, from whence he said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Although John heard this from God's own mouth, he did not always act as if he believed it, but some time after sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire if he were really the Christ (Matt. xi. 2, 3).

Immediately after the baptism Jesus was led up of

the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and in those days he did eat nothing. Moses twice fasted that period. Such fasts are nearly miraculous. The modern fasting men, and the Hindoo fasters, only show that under very abnormal conditions long abstinence from food is possible. Absolutely miraculous events are events which never happened in the past, do not take place in the present, and never will occur in the future. Jesus, it is said, was God, and by his power as God fasted. On the hypothesis of his divinity it is difficult to understand how he became hungry. When hungry the Devil tempted Jesus by offering him stones, and asking him to make them bread. Stones offered to a hungry man for bread-making hardly afford a probable temptation. Which temptation came next is a matter of doubt. Matthew and Luke relate the story in different order. According to one, the Devil next taketh Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and tempts him to throw himself to the bottom, by quoting Scripture that angels should bear him in their arms. Jesus either disbelieved this Scripture or remembered that the Devil, like other pillars of the Church, grossly misquoted to suit his purpose, and the temptation failed. The Devil then took Jesus to an exceeding high mountain, from whence he sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, in a moment of time. It is urged

that this did not include a view of the Antipodes, but only referred to the kingdoms then known; even then it must have been a long look from Judea to China. The mountain must have been very high—much higher than the diameter of the earth. Origen, a learned and pious holy father, suggests that no man in his senses will believe this to have really happened. If Origen had to defend his language before a modern judge of the type of Mr. Justice North, the Christian Father would have sore risk of Holloway Jail. The Devil offered Jesus—who it is declared was one with God, and therefore omnipotent—all the kingdoms of the world if he, Jesus, the omnipotent God, would fall down and worship his own creature, the Devil. Some object that if God is the creator and omnipotent ruler of the world, then the Devil would have no control over the kingdoms of the world, and that the offer could be no temptation as it was made to Jesus, who was God omnipotent and all-wise. Such objectors rely on natural reason.

After the temptation Jesus worked many miracles, casting out devils and otherwise doing marvels amongst the inhabitants of Judea, who seem as a body to have been very unbelieving. If a second Jesus of Nazareth were in this heretical age to boast that he possessed the power of casting out devils, he would stand a fair chance of expiating his offence by a three months' imprisonment with hard labour.

It is true that the 72nd Canon of the Church of England recognizes that ministers can cast out devils, but forbids them to do this unless licensed by the Bishop, "under pain of the imputation of imposture or cozenage." Now, if sick men have a little wisdom the physician is resorted to that he may cure the disease. If men have much wisdom they study physiology while they have health, in order to prevent sickness. In the time of the early Christians prayer and faith (James v. 14, 15) occupied the position since usurped by medicine and experience. Men who had lost their senses in the time of Christ were regarded as attacked not by disease but by the Devil. In the days of Jesus one spirit would make a man blind, or deaf, or dumb; occasionally a number of devils would get into a man and drive him mad. On one occasion Jesus met either one man (Mark v. 2) or two men (Matt. viii. 28) possessed with devils. The devils knew Jesus and addressed him by name. Jesus, not so familiar with the imp or imps, inquired the name of the particular devil he was addressing. The answer, given in Latin, would induce a belief, possibly corroborated by the writings of the monks, that devils communicated in that tongue. Jesus wanted to cast out the devils from the man; this they did not contest, but they expressed a decided objection to being cast out of the country. A compromise was agreed to, and at their own request the devils were transferred to a herd of swine. The

swine ran into the sea and were drowned. There is no record of any compensation to the owner.

Jesus fed large multitudes of people under circumstances of a most ultra-thaumaturgic character. To the first book of Euclid is prefixed an axiom "that the whole is greater than its part." John Wesley was wise if it be true that he eschewed mathematics lest it should lead him to infidelity. If any man be irreligious enough to accept Euclid's axiom he will be compelled to reject the miraculous feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves and two small fishes. The original difficulty of the miracle, though not increased, is made hard to the common mind by the assertion that *after the multitude had been fed twelve baskets full of fragments remained.*

Jesus is related to have walked on the sea when it was very stormy, and when "the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew." Walking on the water is a great feat even if the sea be calm, but when the waves run high it is still more wonderful.

The miracle of turning water into wine at Cana, in Galilee, is worthy of attention when considering the question, Who was Jesus Christ? Jesus and his disciples had been called to a marriage feast, and when there the company fell short of wine. The mother of Jesus, to whom the Catholics offer worship, and to whom they pay great adoration, informed Jesus of the deficiency, and was answered, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet

come." His mother seemed to have expected a miracle, yet in the Fourth Gospel the Cana wonder was the beginning of miracle-working by Jesus; the apocryphal gospels assert that Jesus practised miracle-working as a child. Jesus having obtained six water-pots full of water, turned them into wine. Teetotalers who cannot believe God would specially provide means of drunkenness urge that this wine was not of intoxicating quality, though there is nothing in the text to justify their hypothesis. The curious connexion between the phrase "well drunk" and the time at which the miracle was performed would rather warrant the supposition that the guests were already in such a state as to render it difficult for them to critically appreciate the new vintage. The moral effects of this miracle are not easily appreciable.

Shortly after this Jesus went to the temple with a scourge of small cords, and drove thereout the cattle-dealers and money-changers who had assembled there in the ordinary course of their business. The writer of the Fourth Gospel places this event very early in the public life of Jesus. The writer of the Third Gospel fixes the occurrence much later.

Jesus being hungry went to a fig-tree to gather figs, though the season of figs was not yet come. Of course there were no figs upon the tree, and Jesus then caused the tree to wither away. This is specially interesting as a problem for a true orthodox trinitarian who will believe, first, that Jesus

was God, who made the tree, and prevented it from bearing figs ; second, that God the all-wise, who is not subject to human passions, being hungry, went to the fig-tree, on which he knew there could be no figs, expecting to find some there ; third, that God, the all-just, then punished the tree because it did not bear figs in opposition to God's eternal ordination.

Jesus had a disciple named Peter, who, having much Christian faith, was a great coward, and denied his leader in his hour of need. Jesus, though previously aware that Peter would be a traitor, yet gave him the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and told him that whatsoever he bound on earth should be bound in Heaven. Peter was to have denied Jesus three times before the cock should crow (Matt. xxvi. 34). The cock crowed before Peter's second denial (Mark xiv. 68). Commentators urge that the words used do not refer to the crowing of any particular cock, but to a special hour of the morning called "cock-crow" But if the Gospel be true the explanation is false. Peter's denial becomes the more extraordinary when we remember that he had seen Moses, Jesus, and Elias talking together, and had heard a voice from a cloud say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." As Peter could thus deny Jesus after having heard God vouch his divinity, and Peter not only escapes punishment but gets the office of gate-keeper to Heaven, how much more should those escape punishment and obtain reward who only

deny because they cannot help it, and who have been left without any corroborative evidence of sight or hearing !

The Jesus of the First Gospel promised that, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so he (Jesus) would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Yet he was buried on Friday evening and was out of the grave before Saturday night was over. Some say that the Jews reckoned part of a day as a whole one.

The translators have made Jesus perform a curious equestrian feat on his entry into Jerusalem. The text (Matt. xxi. 7) says they "brought the ass and the colt and put on them their clothes and set him thereon." This does not mean that he rode on both at one time ; it only says so. On the Cross the Jesus of the Four Gospels, who was God, cried out : " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? " God cannot forsake himself. Jesus was God himself. Yet God forsook Jesus, and the latter cried out to know why he was forsaken. Any able divine will explain that of course he knew, and that he was not forsaken. The explanation renders it difficult to believe the dying cry, and the passage becomes one of the mysteries of the holy Christian religion, which, unless a man rightly believe, "without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." At the crucifixion of Jesus wonderful miracles took place. "The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the grave

after his resurrection and appeared unto many." Which saints were these? They "appeared unto many," but there is not the slightest evidence outside the Bible that anyone ever saw them. Their "bodies" came out of the graves. Do not the bodies of the saints decompose like those of ordinary human beings?

Jesus must have much changed in the grave, for his disciples did not know him when he stood on the shore (John xxi. 4), and Mary, most attached to him, knew him not, but supposed that he was the gardener. According to the First Gospel, Jesus appeared to two women after his resurrection, and afterwards met eleven of his disciples by appointment on a mountain in Galilee. When was this appointment made? The text on which divines rely is Matthew xxvi. 32; this makes no such appointment. According to the Second Gospel he appeared first to one woman, and when she told the disciples they did not believe it. Yet, on pain of indictment now and damnation hereafter, we are bound to unhesitatingly accept that which the disciples of Jesus rejected. By the Second Gospel we learn that instead of the eleven going to Galilee after Jesus he came to them as they sat at meat. In the Third Gospel he first appeared to two of his disciples at Emmaus, and they did not know him until they had been a long time in his company—it was evening before they recognized him. Unfortunately, directly

they knew him they did not see him, for as soon as they knew him he vanished out of their sight. He immediately afterwards appeared to the eleven at Jerusalem, and not at Galilee, as stated in the First Gospel. Jesus asked for some meat, and the disciples gave him a portion of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb, and he did eat. Jesus was afterwards taken up into Heaven, a cloud received him, and he was missed. God is everywhere, and Heaven no more above than below, but it is necessary we should believe that Jesus has ascended into Heaven to sit on the right hand of God, who is infinite and has no right hand.

Was Jesus Christ a man? If limited for our answer to the mere Gospel Jesus—surely not. His whole career is, on any literal reading, simply a series of improbabilities or contradictions.

Who was Christ? born of a virgin, and of divine parentage? So too were many of the mythic Sun-gods and so was Krishna, whose story, similar in many respects with that of Jesus, was current long prior to the Christian era.

Was Jesus Christ man or myth? His story being fable, is the hero a reality? That a man named Jesus really lived and performed some special actions attracting popular attention, and thus became the centre for a hundred myths, may well be true; but beyond this what is there of solid fact?

II

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?

THE language in which Jesus taught has not been preserved to us. Who recorded his actual words, or if any real record ever existed, is all matter of guess. Who translated the words of Jesus into the Greek no one knows. In the compass of four pamphlets, attributed to four persons, of whose connexion with the Gospels, as we have them, little or nothing whatever can be ascertained, we have what are, by the orthodox, supposed to be the words in which Jesus actually taught.

What did he teach? Manly, self-reliant resistance of wrong, and practise of right? No; the key-stone of his whole teaching may be found in the text: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."¹ Is poverty of spirit the chief amongst virtues, that Jesus gives it prime place in his teachings? Is it even a virtue at all? Surely not. Manliness of spirit, honesty of spirit, fullness of rightful purpose, these are virtues; poverty of spirit is a crime. When men are poor in spirit, then the proud and haughty in spirit oppress them. When men are true in spirit and determined (as true men should be) to resist, and as far as possible prevent wrong, then is there greater opportunity for present

¹ Matthew. v. 3.

happiness, and, as even Christians ought to admit, no lesser fitness for the enjoyment of further happiness in some may-be heaven. Are you poor in spirit, and are you smitten; in such case what did Jesus teach?—"Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other."¹ Surely better to teach that "he who courts oppression shares the crime"; and if smitten once to take careful measure to prevent a future smiting. Jesus teaches actual invitation of injury. Shelley breathed higher humanity:

"Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms, and looks which are
Weapons of an unvanquished war."

There is a wide distinction between passive resistance to wrong, and courting further injury at the hands of the wrongdoer.

In the teaching of Jesus, poverty of spirit is enforced to the fullest conceivable extent: "Him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again."² Poverty of person is the only possible sequence to this extraordinary manifestation of poverty of spirit. Poverty of person is attended with many unpleasantnesses; and Jesus, who knew that poverty would result from his teaching, says, as if he wished to keep the poor content through their lives with poverty,

¹ Luke vi. 29.

² Luke vi. 29, 30.

"Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."¹ "But woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation."² He pictures one in hell, whose only related vice is that in life he was rich ; and another in heaven, whose only related virtue is that in life he was poor.³ He affirms it is more difficult for a rich man to get into heaven, than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.⁴ The only intent of such teaching could be to induce the poor to remain content in this life with the want and misery of their wretched state in the hope of higher recompense in some future life. Is it good to be content with poverty? Is it not far better to investigate the causes of poverty, with a view to its cure and prevention? The doctrine is most horrid which declares that the poor shall not cease from the face of the earth. Poor in spirit and poor in pocket, with no courage to work for food, or money to purchase it, we might well expect to find the man with empty stomach also who held these doctrines ; and what does Jesus teach? "Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled."⁵ He does not say when the filling shall take place. The date is evidently postponed until men will have no stomachs to replenish. It is not in this life that the hunger is to be sated. "Woe unto you that

¹ Luke vi. 20.² Luke vi. 24.³ Luke xvi. 19-31.⁴ Luke xviii. 25.⁵ Luke vi. 21.

are full, for ye shall hunger." ¹ It would but little advantage the hungry man to bless him by filling him, if a curse awaited the completion of his repast. Craven in spirit, with an empty purse and hungry mouth—what next? The man who has not manliness enough to prevent wrong, will probably bemoan his hard fate, and cry bitterly that sore are the misfortunes he endures. And what does Jesus teach? "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh." ² Is this true, and, if true, when shall the laughter come? "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." ³ Aye, but when? Not while they mourn and weep. Weeping for the past is vain: a deluge of tears will not wash away its history. Weeping for the present is worse than vain—it obstructs your sight. In each minute of your life the aforesaid future is present born, and you need dry and keen eyes to give it and yourself a safe and happy deliverance. When shall they that mourn be comforted? Are slaves that weep salt teardrops on their chains comforted in their weeping? Each pearly overflowing as it falls rusts mind, as well as fetter. Ye who are slaves and weep, will never be comforted until you dry your eyes, and nerve your arms, and, in the plenitude of manliness:

"Shake your chains to earth, like dew
Which in sleep hath fallen on you."

Jesus teaches that the poor, the hungry, and the

¹ Luke vi. 25. ² Luke vi. 21. ³ Matthew v. 4.

wretched shall be blessed. But blessing only comes when they cease to be poor, hungry, and wretched. Contentment under poverty, hunger, and misery is high treason, not to yourself alone, but to your fellows. Slavery spreads quickly wherever humanity is stagnant and content with wrong.

What did Jesus teach? "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."¹ But how if thy neighbour will not hear thy doctrine when thou preachest the "glad tidings of great joy" to him? Then forgetting all your love, and with the bitter hatred that a theological disputant alone can manifest, you "shall shake off the dust from your feet," and by so doing make it more tolerable in the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, than for your unfortunate neighbour who has ventured to reject your teaching.² It is mockery to speak as if love could really result from the dehumanizing and isolating faith required from the disciple of Jesus. Ignatius Loyola in this, at least, was more consistent than his Protestant brethren. "If any man come unto me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"³ "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against

¹ Matthew xix. 19.

² Matthew x. 14, 15.

³ Luke xiv. 26.

his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes they shall be of his own household." ¹

"Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." ² The teaching of Jesus is, in fact, save yourself by yourself. The teaching of humanity should be, to save yourself save your fellow. The human family is a vast chain, each man and woman a link. There is no snapping off one link and preserving for it, isolated from the rest, an entirety of happiness; our joy depends on our brother's also. Jesus teaches that "many are called, but few are chosen"; that the majority will inherit an eternity of misery, while but the minority obtain eternal happiness. And on what is the eternity of bliss to depend? On a truthful course of life? Not so. Jesus puts Father Abraham in Heaven, whose reputation for faith outstrips his character for veracity. The passport through Heaven's portals is faith. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not, shall be damned." ³ Are you married? You love your wife? Both die. You from first to last had said, "I believe," much as a well-trained parrot might say it. You had never examined your reasons for

¹ Matthew x. 34-36.

² Matthew xix. 29.

³ Mark xvi. 16.

your faith ; as a true believer should, you distrusted the efficacy of your carnal reason. You said, "I believe in God and Jesus Christ," because you had been taught to say it, and you would have as glibly said, "I believe in Allah, and in Mahomet his prophet," had your birth-place been a few degrees eastward, and your parents and instructors Turks. You believed in this life, and after death awake in Heaven. Your much-loved wife did not think as you did—she could not. Her organization, education, and temperament were all different from your own. She disbelieved because she could not believe. She was a good wife, but she disbelieved. A good and affectionate mother, but she disbelieved. A virtuous and kindly woman, but she disbelieved. And you are to be happy for an eternity in Heaven, with the knowledge that she is writhing in agony in Hell. If this be true, Shelley was right in declaring that your Christianity

"Peoples earth with demons, hell with men,
And heaven with slaves."

It is urged that Jesus is the saviour of the world, who brought redemption without let or stint to the whole human race. But what did Jesus teach? "Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not,"¹ were his injunctions to those whom he first sent out to preach

¹ Matthew x. 5.

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," is his hard answer to the poor Syrophenician woman who entreated succour for her child. Christianity, as first taught by Jesus, was for the Jews alone; it was only when rejected by them that the world at large had the opportunity of salvation afforded it. "He came unto his own and his own received him not."¹ Why should the Jews be more God's own than the Gentiles? Is God the creator of all? Did he create the descendant of Abraham with greater right and privilege than all other men? Then, indeed, is grievous injustice. You had no choice whether to be born Jew or Gentile; yet to the accident of such a birth is attached the first offer of a salvation which, if accepted, shuts out all beside.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a prominent feature in the teachings of Jesus. Examine the picture drawn by God incarnate of his own special domain. 'Tis likened to a wedding feast,² to which the invited guests coming not, servants were sent out into the highways to gather all they can find—both good and bad. The King, examining his motley array of guests, and finding one without a wedding garment, inquired why he came in to the feast without one. The man, whose attendance had been compulsorily enforced, was speechless. And who can wonder? He was a guest from necessity, not choice; he

¹ John i. 11.

² Matthew xxii. 2.

chose neither the fashion of his coming, nor that of his attiring. Then comes the King's decree, the command of the all-merciful and loving King of Heaven. "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Commentators urge that it was the custom to provide wedding garments for all guests, and that this man was punished for his non-acceptance of the customary and ready robe. The text does not warrant this explanation, but gives as moral of the parable, that an invitation to the heavenly feast will not ensure partakal of it, for that "many are called, but few are chosen." What more of the Kingdom of Heaven? "Joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance."¹ The greater sinner one has been, the better saint he makes, and the more he has sinned, so much the more he loves God. "To whom little is forgiven the same loveth little."² Thus asserting that a life of vice, with its stains washed away by a death-bed repentance, is better than a life of consistent and virtuous conduct. Why should the fatted calf be killed for the prodigal son?³ Why should men be taught to make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness?⁴ These ambiguities, these assertions of punishment and forgiveness of crime, instead

¹ Luke xv. 7.³ Luke xv. 27.² Luke vii. 47.⁴ Luke xvi. 9.

of directions for its prevention and cure, are serious blots on a system alleged to have been inculcated by one for whom his followers claim divinity.

Will you urge the love of Jesus as the redeeming feature of the teaching? Then read the story of the fig tree¹ withered by the hungry Jesus. The fig tree was, if he were all-powerful God, made by him; he limited its growth and regulated its development; he prevented it from bearing figs, expected fruit where he had rendered fruit impossible, and in his *infinite love* was angry that the tree had not upon it that it could not have. What love is expressed in that remarkable speech which follows one of his parables: "For, I say unto you, that unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him. *But those, mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me.*"² What love is expressed by that Jesus who, if he were God, represents himself as saying to the majority of his unfortunate creatures (for it is the few that are chosen): "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."³ There is no love in this horrid doctrine of eternal torment. And yet the popular preachers of to-day talk first of the love of God and then of

¹ Matthew xxi. 18-22; Mark xi. 12-24.

² Luke xix. 26, 27.

³ Matthew xxv. 41.

"Hell, a red gulf of everlasting fire,
Where poisonous and undying worms prolong
Eternal misery to those hapless slaves
Whose life has been a penance for its crimes."

In the sayings attributed to Jesus there is the passage which influenced so extraordinarily the famous Origen.¹ If he understood it wrongly, what of the wisdom of teaching which expresses itself so vaguely? The general intent of Christ's teaching seems to be an inculcation of neglect of this life in search for another. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."² "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on . . . take no thought saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."³ These texts, if fully observed, would be most disastrous; they would stay all scientific discoveries, prevent all development of man's energies. In the struggle for existence, men are compelled to become acquainted with the conditions which compel happiness or misery. It is only in the practical application of that knowledge that the wants of society are ascertained, and disease, poverty, hunger, and wretchedness prevented, or at any rate lessened.

¹ Matthew xix. 12.

² John vi. 27.

³ Matthew vi. 25-33.

Jesus substitutes "I believe" for "I think," and puts "watch and pray" instead of "think, then act." Belief is the prominent doctrine which pervades and governs all Christianity. It is represented that, at the judgment, the world will be reproved "Of sin, because they believe not." This teaching is most disastrous; man should be incited to active thought: Christian belief would bind him to the teachings of a stagnant past.

Fit companion to blind belief is slave-like prayer. Men pray as though God needed most abject entreaty ere he would grant justice. What does Jesus teach on prayer? "After this manner pray ye—Our Father which art in heaven." Do you think that God is the Father of all, when you pray that he will enable you to defeat some others of his children, with whom your nation is at war? And why "which art in Heaven"? Where is your Heaven? you look upward, and if you were at the Antipodes, would look upward still. But that upward would be downward to us. Do you localize Heaven? Why say "which art in Heaven"? Is God infinite, then he is also in earth. "Hallowed be thy name." What is God's name? if you know it not how can you hallow it? How can God's name be hallowed even if you know it? "Thy kingdom come." What is God's kingdom, and will your praying bring it quicker? Is it the Judgment day? and do you say "Love one another," pray for the more speedy arrival of that

day, on which God may say to your fellow "depart ye cursed into everlasting fire"? "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." How is God's will done in heaven? If the Devil be a fallen angel, there must have been rebellion even there. "Give us this day our daily bread." Will the prayer get it without work? No. Will work get it without prayer? Yes. Why pray, then, for bread to God, who says, "Blessed be ye that hunger . . . woe unto you that are full"? "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."¹ What debts have we to God? Sins? Coleridge writes: "A sin is an evil which has its ground or origin in the agent, and not in the compulsion of circumstances. Circumstances are compulsory, from the absence of a power to resist or control them; and if the absence likewise be the effect of circumstances . . . the evil derives from the circumstances . . . and such evil is not sin."² Do you say that you are independent of all circumstances, that you can control them, that you have a free will? Buckle replies that the assertion of a free will "involves two assumptions, of which the first, though possibly true, has never been proved, and the second is unquestionably false. These assumptions are that there is an independent faculty, called consciousness, and that the dictates of that faculty are infallible."³ "And lead

¹ Matthew vi. 12. ² "Aids to Reflection," 1843, p. 200.

³ "History of Civilization," vol. i, p. 14.

us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."¹ Do you think God may lead you into temptation? If so, you cannot think him all-good; if not all-good, he is not God. If God, the prayer is blasphemy.

Jesus, according to the general declaration of Christian divines, came to die, and what does he teach by his death? The Rev. F. D. Maurice well said, "That he who kills for a faith must be weak, that he who dies for a faith must be strong." How did Jesus die? Giordano Bruno and Julius Cæsar Vanini were burned, charged with heresy. They died calm, heroic, defiant of wrong. Jesus, who could not die, courted death, that he, as God, might accept his own atonement, and might pardon man for a sin which the pardoned man had not committed, and in which he had no share. The death Jesus courted came, and when it came he could not face it, but prayed to himself that he might not die. And at last, when on the cross, if two gospels do him no injustice, his last words were a bitter cry of deep despair. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Rev. Enoch Mellor, writing on the Atonement, says: "I seek not to fathom the profound mystery of these words. To understand their full import would require one to experience the agony of desertion they express." Do the words, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' express an "agony" caused by a consciousness of "deser-

¹ Matthew vi. 13.

tion"? If this be not the meaning conveyed by the despairing death-cry, then there is in it no meaning whatever. And if these words do express a "bitter agony of desertion," then they emphatically contradict the teachings of Jesus. "Before Abraham was, I am." "I and my father are one." "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." These were the words of Jesus—words conveying an impression that divinity was claimed by the one who uttered them.

If Jesus had indeed been God, the words, "My God, my God," would have been a mockery most extreme. God could not have deemed himself forsaken by himself. The dying Jesus, in that despair, confessed himself either the dupe of some other teaching, a self-deluded enthusiast, or an arch-impostor, who in that bitter cry, with the wide-opening of the flood-gates through which life's stream ran out, confessed aloud that he, at least, was no deity, and deemed himself a God-forsaken man. The garden scene of agony is fitting prelude to this most terrible act. Jesus, who is God, prays to himself; in "agony he prayed most earnestly."¹ He refuses to hear his own prayers, and he, the omnipotent, is forearmed against his coming trial by an angel from heaven, who "strengthened" the great Creator.

Was Jesus the Son of God? Praying, he said,

¹ Luke xxii. 44.

"Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." ¹ And was he glorified? His death and resurrection most strongly disbelieved in the very city where they are alleged to have happened. His doctrines rejected by the only people to whom he preached them. His miracles denied by the only nation amongst whom they are alleged to have been performed; and he himself thus on the cross crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Nor is it true that the teachings of Jesus are generally received. Jesus taught: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." ² How many of those who profess to believe in Jesus would be content to be tested by these signs? Any person claiming that each sign was to be found manifested in her or his case would be regarded as mad. Illustrations of faith-healing occasionally arise, but are not always reliable, nor are such cures limited to those who profess faith in Jesus. The gift of speaking with new tongues has been the claim of a very small sect. Serpent-charming is more practised among Hindus than among Christians.

Peace and love are alleged to be the special char-

¹ John xvii. 2.

² Mark xvi. 17, 18.

acteristics of Christianity. Yet the whole history of Christian nations has been blurred by war and hate. Now and for the past thirty years the most civilized amongst Christian nations have been devoting enormous sums and huge masses of men to the preparation for war. Torpedoes and explosive shells, one hundred ton guns and melinite, are by Christian rulers accounted better aids than faith in Jesus.

DOUBTS IN DIALOGUE
CHRISTIAN PRIEST AND UNBELIEVER.—I

[*"National Reformer," August 31st, 1884.*]

CHRISTIAN PRIEST.—At least, belief is the safe side. When you die, if your unbelief be right, there is an end of you and of all your heresy ; and if it is wrong, there is eternal torment as your sad lot.

UNBELIEVER.—Hardly so. If I am right, my unbelief will live after me, in its encouragement to others to honest protest against the superstitions which hinder progress.

C. P.—But you, at any rate, may be wrong, and belief is, therefore, safest for you.

U.—Which belief ? Must I accept alike all creeds ?

C. P.—No ; that is not possible. You are asked to accept the true Christian faith.

U.—Why not the true Jewish faith ?

C. P.—A new dispensation was given through Jesus.

U.—Why not the true Mahommedan faith ?

C. P.—Mahommed was an impostor.

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U.—About two hundred millions of human beings now believe that he was the prophet of God, and that the Koran is a divine revelation.

C. P.—He was a false prophet. His pretence that the Koran was revelation was an imposture.

U.—Then it would not be safe for me to believe in Mahommed?

C. P.—Certainly not; you must believe in Christ and in the Gospels.

U.—Would it not be enough to believe in Buddha, and the blessing of eternal repose in Nirvana?

C. P.—Buddhism is the equivalent of Atheism. Nirvana is another word for annihilation.

U.—But some four hundred millions are Buddhists, and the character of Buddha is placed very high.

C. P.—The true faith is that in Jesus, and in him crucified.

U.—Do you mean the man Jesus in whom the Unitarians believe?

C. P.—Unitarians! Do you not know that there is a special canon of the law-established Church against "the damnable and cursed heresie of Socinianism"? It is belief in Jesus as God, the second person in the Holy Trinity.

U.—In the Trinity as painted at Holyrood? or in the new Cathedral at Moscow?

C. P.—It is the Trinity as taught in the New Testament you must believe. The paintings you refer to are profane, idolatrous, and blasphemous.

U.—But have not the latest revisers omitted from the New Testament, as being a pious fraud, the strongest Trinitarian text ?

C. P.—The omission does not weaken the doctrine ; the Trinity in Unity must be believed.

U.—But not painted. May it be thought ?

C. P.—Of course.

U.—But can I think man who is God, who is begotten yet eternal ?

C. P.—You must believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three in one.

U.—Are there in the Trinity three persons, each God ?

C. P.—Yes ; but there is only one God, who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to die for it.

U.—Is Jesus the only begotten son of God ?

C. P.—Yes ; begotten before all worlds.

U.—Is Jesus God ?

C. P.—Yes ; very God of very God

U.—Had Jesus a mother ?

C. P.—Yes ; the Virgin Mary.

U.—When did she live ?

C. P.—About 1,900 years ago.

U.—Was that before all worlds ?

C. P.—Your attempt to reason will lead you to heresy. Belief without reason is the safe side.

U.—Did Jesus die ?

C. P.—Yes.

U.—Was he quite dead ?

C. P.—Yes.

U.—After he was quite dead did he eat and drink ?

C. P.—He first came to life again.

U.—How long was he really dead before he came to life again ?

C. P.—He died on Friday, and rose from the dead before dawn on Sunday.

U.—So that God, to show his love for the world, let his only son die for one whole day, part of another day, and not quite two nights ?

C. P.—That is indeed blasphemy as well as heresy ; believe as the Church teaches, that in the grave Christ triumphed over death.

U.—Which Church ? The Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Free Church, the Established Church, the Lutheran Church, the Calvinist, the Roman Catholic, the Methodist—which of these is the safest ?

C. P.—There is only one true Church, that as by law established.

U.—But as interpreted by Colenso ? by Mackonochie ? by Convocation ? or by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ?

C. P.—Do not distress me with these doubts. At any rate believe in Christ as taught in the Gospel.

U.—Which version of the Gospel, that of Rheims ? or the authorized version of King James ? or the revised version of the present day ?

C. P.—Do not raise these quibbles as to versions ; have faith.

U.—In what or whom ?

C. P.—In God our father in heaven.

U.—The father of the English and the Soudanese ? of the French and the Hovas ? of the Boer and the Zulu ?

C. P.—The Father of all.

U.—Who, having the power to prevent war, permits it ? Who, being able to hinder disease, promotes it ?

C. P.—These are mysteries ; be content to believe and trust.

U.—In God who sent the earthquake in Java ? The cholera in Marseilles and Toulon ?

C. P.—Doubt is dangerous, belief is safe, your puny intellect cannot measure the infinite.

U.—Will all unbelievers in Jesus be tormented eternally ?

C. P.—Yes.

U.—Is not that unfair to the millions who are unbelievers because they have never heard of Jesus except as I may hear of Obi ?

C. P.—God will be merciful to those who have not heard the gospel, and therefore cannot believe.

U.—Is not that, then, very hard on the one who is unbeliever because having heard the Gospel he cannot believe it ?

C. P.—You are now judging the rule of the omni-

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potent, measuring the plan of the all-wise ; be content to believe.

U.—Will those who have never heard the Gospel escape despite their unbelief ?

C. P.—I have said God is merciful ; he will punish those who, having heard, reject.

U.—But do not your Church and many other Christian Churches send missionaries to preach the Gospel to those who have not heard it ?

C. P.—Yes, our missionaries to heathen lands are the glory of all our Churches.

U.—But do they not thus take the possibility of damnation to those who would otherwise escape ?

The Christian Priest here turned away despairingly.

CHRISTIAN PRIEST AND UNBELIEVER.—II

[*"National Reformer," September 7th, 1884.*]

C. P.—Believe in Jesus and be saved.

U.—Were the immediate disciples of Jesus saved ?

C. P.—Certainly, except perhaps Judas, but why the doubt ?

U.—Thomas would not believe (John xx. 25) ; was he damned ?

C. P.—Even he believed at last ; believe and repent.

U.—No, when he had evidence (v. 27) he knew ;

you ask me to believe upon grounds satisfactory to you ; like Thomas I claim to examine for myself. Thomas said : " I will not believe," I say that I cannot believe. But those that were with Jesus (Mark xvi. 11) believed not, nor when two of the disciples told the residue that they had seen Jesus, " neither believed they " (v. 13) ; were these saved ?

C. P.—They all believed when they saw Jesus.

U.—But is not actual seeing more than mere belief ? If not, may I see ? When the disciples actually saw Jesus they surely scarcely deserved eternal salvation because they saw ? They could not help seeing.

C. P.—But Jesus himself taught that he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but that he that believeth not shall be damned.

U.—Did Jesus certainly teach this ? In my revised version, printed at the Oxford University Press, I read that " the two oldest Greek manuscripts and some other authorities " omit these words.

C. P.—Leave those critical questions to scholars ; be humble in spirit, and have faith.

U.—In what ? or whom ?

C. P.—In Jesus.

U.—But the disciples who knew him intimately had small faith in Jesus. When he was arrested " they all forsook him and fled " (Mark xiv. 50), and it is pretended that these very ones who so forsook him had seen Jesus feed the hungry, cure the sick,

make the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the dead rise again to life.

C. P.—Do not say pretended ; that is blasphemy.

U.—But did Peter really see dead Lazarus raised again to life, and yet deny ? Was John the son of Zebedee, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and did he run away at the first approach of danger ? Would not this be the veriest hardihood and audacity of disbelief ?

C. P.—These things are mysteries ; leave these and believe.

U.—But these disciples who did not believe were all specially selected by Jesus himself ; did he know that they would be unbelievers, and that their unbelief would hinder my faith ?

C. P.—You are now setting up the pride of your reason against the things of God ; be as a little child ; of such is the kingdom of heaven.

U.—Was Jesus a young child, and did he grow through boyhood to manhood ?

C. P.—Yes, so the Gospel teaches.

U.—And must I believe that he was a God whilst he was a young child ?

C. P.—He was God incarnate to suffer and redeem.

U.—And whilst a child still God. Then are the legends I find in every ancient faith of God-born children who grew through childhood into manhood, and were Gods—are these, too, to be believed ?

C. P.—No, they are false religious legends—myths ;

the infant Bacchus, or Hor, or Hercules, these are mostly sun-myths.

U.—Mostly older, though, than the myth of Jesus ; how do you make the modern copy truer than the ancient fable ?

C. P.—If you call Jesus myth, how do you account for Christianity ?

U.—Calling, as you do, Hor myth, how do you account for Osirianism ? Calling Krishna myth, how do you account for Hinduism ?

C. P.—But think of the great men who have believed in Jesus.

U.—And of the great men who have believed in Mahommed, Buddha, Ra, and Agni. It is in their creeds that great men are often very weakly.

C. P.—But Christianity is spreading all over the world, other religions are dying away.

U.—It would be more true to say that all religions are dying away. Christianity spreads where your cannon take it, and where your bayonet keeps it ; see in Zululand, in Afghanistan ; it exterminates where it has foothold, as amongst the Maories, the Fijians, the Hawaiians, the Hovas. But does it so surely spread at home ?

C. P.—Certainly ; what do you mean ?

U.—In England the majority of your population from cradle to grave, save for baptism, marriage or funeral, never enter Church or Chapel ; in Ireland, Catholics, more devout, shoot landlords, and Ulster

Protestants, more pious, shoot Nationalists. In Italy scarce a prominent man who is not avowedly indifferent or hostile to Christianity. In France the public men are most careless of religion or repudiate it. In Germany the educated are nearly all Free-thinkers, the pious nearly all soldiers.

C. P.—Do not talk of the Continent ; its inhabitants are Sabbath-breakers.

U.—Shall I limit Christianity to the few in these islands, and look at home, say in outcast London, Ratcliff Highway, or the Mint, or Flower and Dean Street, or the old Sanctuary ? amongst the very poor and miserable in the still undestroyed narrow courts of Drury Lane ? or shall I take the outcast rich in the public streets about midnight, within half a mile of Westminster Abbey ? are these the fruits of eighteen centuries of Christianity ?

C. P.—These are sins and shames against which our Church ever labours ; look to our Christian-founded hospitals and libraries.

U.—But these have grown since civilization has compelled them. The crime and your Church have dwelt together for centuries. In Rome, Paris, London, great piety, great riches, great crime, and your Church, always mighty for evil and mostly powerless for good.

C. P.—I cannot listen : these things are not true ; it is unjust to put on the Church the sins of great cities where infidelity is rampant.

U.—But it is the pious in these cities who are fashionable and criminal; and there are terrors of crime which touch your Church even in its highest ranks. Heresy, or as you call it, infidelity, has during 300 years done something to purify—the corruption is part of your history. But take, too, your agricultural districts where, even to-day, there would be scant mercy for an infidel preacher, and reach me your assize calendars and total for me the record of your ordinary and of your nameless crimes. Is this the result of 1800 years of your Church?

C. P.—No, this is the natural wickedness of man; and if you destroy our faith what will you give us in its stead?

U.—Where is your faith recorded? and is your natural inclination to wickedness God-given?

C. P.—It is in the Bible, God's word, you will find our faith; with what will you replace it? Man has a free will; do not blasphemously put his sins on God.

U.—But do you believe and practise the Bible? Do you imitate Abraham—father Abraham? or Lot? or Jacob? or Saul? or David? or Solomon? or Ezekiel? or Hosea?

C. P.—These were of the old dispensation; I preach Jesus.

U.—Then you, too, do put away as it suits you a large part of the Bible; but you keep to Jesus.

C. P.—Yes; and what will you give me in his stead?

U.—Do you keep to Jesus? The Jesus of the Gospels said, Blessed be ye poor; and your Church is rich. He said, take no thought for the morrow; and your Ecclesiastical Commissioners have stringent covenants for 99 years of to-morrows. He said, thou shalt not swear; you swear yourselves, and compel others, too, to swear. He said, judge not, and agree with thine adversary quickly; and you rely on Lord Penzance, monitions, sequestrations, capias, and long-pending litigation. If Jesus came to-day to St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey, you would probably send him on the morrow to Holloway Jail as a brawler.

C. P.—Why harden your heart in unbelief? why not receive the Gospel prayerfully and humbly?

U.—Does that mean that I should accept what you call the gospel without trying to find out whether such gospel is truth or error, or a mixture of both?

C. P.—The gospel is God's word to humankind; to doubt it is to sin.

U.—How am I to be satisfied of that?

C. P.—The very desire for satisfaction is sin. The gospel is attested by miracle, and has been accepted by the wisest and best of mankind.

U.—But the miracle itself has not been worked to me; if I may not examine it how can it attest? There are many millions who have not accepted the



gospel you preach. What is the evidence to me of a miracle dating back nearly twenty centuries, and performed before a foreign people?

C. P.—The whole testimony of the Church. Indeed God speaks.

U.—But I do not hear; and is the testimony of the Church even to-day unanimous?

C. P.—On the main points, yes; the doctrinal differences between the various Christian sects are trifling.

U.—If that be really so, why do not the various religious bodies, say, in England, sink these trifling differences and unite in one Church?

C. P.—For practical purposes there is that union.

U.—Is that quite true? Are Roman Catholics united with Protestants? Do they freely preach from each other's pulpits? Do Church of England clergymen willingly bury unbaptized Nonconformists in consecrated ground? Is there perfect concord and unity between the *Tablet*, the *Church Times*, and the *Rock*? Did the Bishop of Capetown work in harmony with Dr. Colenso? Do even devout Low-Churchmen who promote law-suits against Ritualists give illustration of such union?

C. P.—At least in all good work these bodies, prelates and writers, sink all minor differences and are united. Take hospitals, the promotion of temperance, the abolition of slavery, and other charitable undertakings.

U.—But in a Catholic hospital would a Protestant Christian be allowed to die quietly in his heresy? And how long has the union existed? Your Christianity is claimed to be in its nineteenth century, and the union of the great Catholic and Protestant divisions of your Church is in this country not yet sixty years old even in possibility. The approach to toleration of each other has been compelled by educated public opinion; it is no natural outgrowth. Rack, faggot, and dungeon marked the differences, not the union. Nor did your churches unite for the abolition of slavery; if they united at all it was to oppose the abolition. It is not even quite certain that they are temperate, or that as a whole they have worked for temperance.

C. P.—You are leaving untouched the entreaty I made to you that you should accept the gospel prayerfully and humbly. You are drifting into criticisms on the conduct of individuals, some of them unworthy of their priestly office.

U.—Why may I not judge the tree by its fruit? Why may I not examine your gospel before I accept it?

C. P.—It is God's gospel, the gospel of Jesus—this should be enough for you.

U.—Am I not entitled to test it by my reason?

C. P.—Human reason is a dangerous and unsafe standard whereby to test heavenly things.

U.—You present for my acceptance the gospel of Christ; well, I offer you the gospel of Krishna.

C. P.—You have no authority for this ; it is a false gospel.

U.—What authority have you ? Krishna was God incarnate.

C. P.—The very suggestion is blasphemy ; the story was borrowed from the Christian gospels.

U.—But the Krishna story was current at least 2000 years before Christ is claimed to have existed. It is vouched by miracle.

C. P.—The Hindoo miracles are absurd and ridiculous.

U.—So to me are those of your own bible ; so to me are those of the Christian healer who is now in South Australia curing the sick by hundreds.

C. P.—Many of the Hindoo sacred writings are coarse, voluptuous, and even filthy.

U.—So to me are many of the Hebrew sacred writings.

C. P.—The Krishna story is monstrous and unreasonable.

U.—But you have taught me that human reason is a dangerous and unsafe guide in matters of religion. But I pass to the Koran offered to you by Mahommed, the prophet of the Lord.

C. P.—Mahommed was a false prophet and impostor.

U.—Is not that exactly what the Jews said of Jesus ?

C. P.—But Mahomedanism has for centuries been maintained and spread by the sword.

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U.—So was Christianity from the 4th to the 16th centuries ; and even to-day a Christian bishop blesses an invading army, declaring that it may cut a road for the Christian missionary.

C. P.—But Mahommedans are fatalists.

U.—So were Luther, Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards.

C. P.—Oh, do not harden your heart ; repent of your unbelief and believe. God is merciful, and will forgive you.

U.—Do you mean that God, having blinded my eyes, will forgive me if I repent that I have not seen, and if I will believe that I see when I do not ? Or do you mean that having given me sight and hearing he will punish me for having seen and listened unless I will repent and believe that I am blind and deaf ?

C. P.—These are quibbles, hardened man ; dare you reject God's truth ?

U.—Reject God's truth spoken from opposite points with opposite meanings and in irreconcilable terms ? How can I choose, how determine which is the truth if I may not examine and test all presentation ? I may test a coin, a jewel, on the acquirement of which I only expend the results of a day, a week, or a month, but I may not test the jewel on the acceptance or rejection of which you say depends the happiness of an eternity. I cannot see in the black underground of hidden things, I must have light.

CHRISTIAN PRIEST AND SCEPTIC ON
CHRISTMASTIDE[*"National Reformer," December 25th, 1884.*]

CHRISTIAN PRIEST.—At least, this anniversary of the message of peace and good-will to all the world should touch even your cold heart.

SCEPTIC.—Was the message of peace and good-will? and was it to all the world?

C. P.—Why, surely yes. God so loved the world that he gave his only son to die for it.

S.—Could he not have shown his love without killing his own son?

C. P.—That is mystery; take his love—it is given freely.

S.—Given or bought? Do the poor get this gift of love to lighten their misery? Given or taken? Do the weak get this gift of love to aid their helplessness?

C. P.—Yes, it is for all, but especially for the poor and the weak; theirs is the blessing.

S.—Is that quite true of the country poor in cottages quite unfit for human dwellings, or of the town poor in filthy court and squalid alley? Is that quite true of the weaker races scattered through the world, kidnapped and harried for the greed of their stronger Christian brethren?

C. P.—Here man's wickedness hinders God's love.

S.—Can finite man's wickedness hinder omnipotent God's infinite goodness?

C. P.—This, again, is mystery; but it is rather of the eternal future I would speak.

S.—Peace and good-will for the dead as set-off for war and malice amongst the living.

C. P.—True Christianity would in this world abolish war and uproot malice.

S.—Would it? Why, then, do Christian nations make larger preparations for war than were ever made by any Pagan peoples? Why do these gathered in Christian churches pray for victory in war, and sing *Te Deum laudamus* when the carnage has been great?

C. P.—I said true Christianity, and you deal only with those who are mere professors.

S.—But then there is no professedly Christian nation which is really Christian. Then there has never been any professedly Christian nation which has been really Christian, for every so-called Christian people has had the priest-blessed wars.

C. P.—Alas! they have departed from the Gospel.

S.—Or kept too closely to its injunctions. They have remembered that Jesus came to fulfil the law and the prophets, and that the law and the prophets brim over with great slaughterings by the Lord's people in the name of the Lord.

C. P.—It is of the peace and good-will of the new covenant I would speak.

S.—Which made a man's foes of his own household, instead as theretofore only of the nations that are round about him.

C. P.—But Jesus meant a message of peace.

S.—And unfortunately intentionally so preached it that even those who heard him shou'd not understand his meaning, lest they should be converted.

C. P.—But look at the countries where Christianity is triumphant.

S.—Yes, begin at home: Ireland held like a conquered province by an occupying army and speaking peace at night by the blunderbuss through cottage windows; Scotland, land of Knox, where crofters starve and deer multiply; England, which kidnaps coolies, steals South African territories and blows Arabs suddenly to heaven with mines; Germany with a pious Emperor and the largest army in the world; Spain with a monarchy tempered by poison, and Rome with a Church sanctified by brigandage.

C. P.—These again are men's sins for which God will punish.

S.—Yes, but where is the message of peace and good-will? Just now we are shipping explosives to the Soudan, to destroy the followers of the Mahdi, and are watching every vessel and searching every package lest some of our loving Christian brethren should preach to us the gospel of nitro-glycerine. Is it not cant and hypocrisy to pretend to be better than the mad and criminal men who tried to destroy

London Bridge, whilst we have laboratories at Woolwich and elsewhere for the manufacture of torpedoes and explosive shells? Is it not cant and hypocrisy to preach peace and good-will on Christmas Day when your navy and army at home and in India cost more than £45,000,000 a year and you in Britain alone have spent in war during the last 200 years more than £2,000,000,000?

A THEIST AND ATHEIST

[*"National Reformer," January 11th, 1835*]

THEIST.—Surely your Atheism is most unreasonable. How can the universe exist without God?

ATHEIST.—What do you mean by "God"? and what by Universe?

T.—By God, the creator, preserver, and ruler of all things. By the universe, all that he has created.

A.—What do you mean by creation?

T.—Origination—beginning.

A.—A chair is originated from the wood of a tree; a stalagmite is begun by the water dripping through from the limestone.

T.—Those are instances of change of form. By creation I mean origin of existence.

A.—Do you mean that once the universe was not, and that what you call "God" created the universe?

T.—Yes.

A.—By universe I mean all phenomena, and all that is necessary for the happening of each and every phenomenon. I cannot think the universe non-existent—can you?

T.—The universe must have had a commencement.

A.—Why? Why may it not always have existed?

T.—Everything must have had a beginning.

A.—Even the Creator?

T.—No; he is eternal.

A.—Why he? and what do you mean by eternal?

T.—Not to think a personal deity is Atheistic, and the deity is self-existent. By eternal I mean without beginning.

A.—But even if deity must be personal, why masculine? and how do you think masculine person self-existent?

T.—All religions make God a masculine person. I cannot help thinking God self-existent.

A.—But are all religions true?

T.—Truth pervades them all, but there is only one true religion.

A.—Then the pervading truth does not save the great mass of religions from falseness. But if you can think God self-existent, why may I not think universe self-existent?

T.—The universe is finite; God is infinite.

A.—Then there exists infinity *plus* the finite universe. By infinite I mean illimitable extension, indefinable extent; that is, extension of ∞ , to which

I cannot think bounds. You say God is infinite. Infinite what ?

T.—Infinite God.

A.—But what is God ?

T.—I have already answered ; the creator, preserver, and ruler of all things.

A.—But five minutes before the creation of anything what was God ?

T.—God is a spirit.

A.—But what is spirit ?

T.—All that is not matter.

A.—Five minutes before the creation of matter what was spirit ?

T.—The question is monstrous.

A.—Only because it is the test of a monstrous misstatement.

T.—But if there be no God, whence came intelligence ?

A.—Intelligence is not an entity, it is a result, and an ever-changing result.

T.—What do you mean ?

A.—Intelligence = all mental phases,—perception, including consciousness, memory, comparison, judgment, reflection, reason. Intelligence does not come from, or go to ; it grows with and of. Unless you change the meaning of words, God is not properly describable as intelligent.

T.—Why ?

A.—The basis of intelligence is in sensation. Prior to creation what could God sensate ?

T.—You cannot compass God with finite terms and by your finite mind.

A.—Yet you preach God in finite terms and to my finite mind.

T.—Your Atheism is mere negation.

A.—Not so, except as the affirmation of any truth negates the falsehood it contradicts.

T.—Your Atheism leads men to vice.

A.—First, that is rather abuse than argument, and if true, would scarcely demonstrate the existence of God. Are all Theists virtuous?

T.—Unfortunately not.

A.—Are most criminals Theists?

T.—They profess religion, but they are practical Atheists.

A.—The last statement is again abuse. Are all Atheists vicious?

T.—No ; they are, many of them, better than their principles.

A.—That, again, is abuse, unless you state the Atheistic principles which you allege lead to vice.

T.—Why should not an Atheist lie and steal and cheat, if he can do it without being found out?

A.—Why should he? It is easier to tell the truth than to lie, especially if you cultivate the habit of truth-telling ; stealing and cheating are practices of social misdoing which involve at least the possibility of being discovered. An Atheist cannot clear himself from rascality by repentance. He finds it much

A CURATE AND A DOUBTER 113

more comfortable and profitable to encourage habits of truthfulness and honesty in others by practising them himself.

T.—But this is a low and selfish vice.

A.—Is it? It is a view which, if extensively adopted, would afford ground for economy in jail chaplains, who would not be required to preach to orthodox convicts.

A CHURCH OF ENGLAND CURATE AND A DOUBTER .

[*"National Reformer," August 9th, 1885.*]

CURATE.—God so loved the world that he gave his only son to die for it.

DOUBTER.—When?

C.—Jesus died somewhere about 1,850 years ago.

D.—For what did Jesus die?

C.—To redeem the world from the consequences of Adam's sin.

D.—When did Adam sin?

C.—About 4,000 years before the birth of Jesus.

D.—If God so loved the world, why did he delay the redemption for 4,000 years?

C.—That is not for finite minds to judge.

D.—Yet you teach that finite minds must believe without judgment. But was Adam punished for his sin?

C.—Yes.

D.—Is it just to punish one who is not guilty for a sin for which Adam suffered?

C.—But the penalty was a curse which passed on Adam's descendants, and it is from this curse that the sacrifice of Jesus redeemed the world.

D.—Does the redemption extend to the whole world?

C.—Yes, if they believe, and are baptized.

D.—What was Adam's sin?

C.—He disobeyed God.

D.—Is God all-powerful?

C.—Yes.

D.—Did he create and control Adam?

C.—Yes.

D.—Can the creature disobey the omnipotent controller?

C.—God gave man liberty.

D.—Liberty to fall?

C.—If Adam had chosen, he might have stood upright; God gave him the noblest gifts. Through Adam's own fault he fell.

D.—Before Adam's fall, could he distinguish good from evil?

C.—No.

D.—How then could he choose between them?

C.—He had God's command to guide him.

D.—Do the commands of the omnipotent guide or compel? Can the irresistible be resisted?

C.—You forget man had free will.

D.—Do you mean that God being infinite, his will was everywhere omnipotent, but that in some places and under some circumstances Adam's will was stronger than that of God?

C.—No. I mean that omnipotent God allowed man to be free.

D.—That is, that God, being able to prevent sin, would not. But in human morals, is not one who knows of a crime about to be committed, and who might prevent it and does not—is not such a one treated as accessory before the fact? and in legal jargon is not an accessory before the fact treated as if a principal in the crime?

C.—God's ways are not as man's ways.

D.—But is not acquiescence in crime criminal?

C.—God did not acquiesce in Adam's crime.

D.—He did more than acquiesce, he contrived the crime.

C.—That is blasphemy.

D.—Is God omniscient?

C.—Yes.

D.—Did he, before he created Adam, know that Adam would sin?

C.—Yes.

D.—Have any of the millions of people, who have peopled the world since Adam, died unredeemed by Jesus?

C.—Yes, the large majority die unredeemed. The holy scriptures say, "Few are chosen."

D.—And did God know this before he created any?

C.—Yes.

D.—And did he then so love the world that he created them to suffer by unnumbered millions?

C.—That is a difficulty a finite mind cannot grasp.

D.—And yet you teach that the finite mind is to suffer if it cannot believe. Was there any existence beside God before creation?

C.—Certainly not.

D.—Is God infinitely good?

C.—Most certainly yes.

D.—Then before creation there was no evil?

C.—No.

D.—Is it compatible with God's infinite goodness that he should have created evil?

C.—This again is beyond the sphere of finite reason, and you Materialists have equal difficulty. You have evil in Nature; how do you account for that?

D.—Which evil? or which evils? Some, science does account for, others she is examining. Take, for instance, the Lisbon or Java earthquake: science notes the shocks, marks the range, warns the inhabitants, and, though knowing but little, adds daily to her knowledge. Take the evils of poverty, crime, disease: science has studied a thousand theories, connoted the experience of generations, and at least does not kneel blindly before disaster, but grapples in

earnest effort for amelioration. But the Materialist's inability to explain the whole of Nature does not justify your inability to explain the creed to which you ask my adhesion.

A RESPECTABLE MAN OF THE WORLD, RE-
PUTEDLY PIOUS, AND A HERETIC ADDICTED
TO PUBLIC ADVOCACY OF FREETHOUGHT

[*"National Reformer," July 25th, 1886.*]

R. M. W.—What is the use of disturbing men's views on religion? Some religion is necessary to restrain the lower classes.

H.—I do not admit your last proposition. The utility of provoking thought seems to me too clear to need defence.

R. M. W.—But you must admit that infidelity is unfashionable, and that to be known as an aggressive infidel is a barrier to any respectable career.

H.—Are not the cases of Mill, Tyndall, Huxley, Darwin, instances to the contrary?

R. M. W.—Tyndall is not an infidel, nor is Huxley; certainly neither of them should be described as aggressive infidels.

H.—A few years ago Tyndall was very hotly and sometimes coarsely denounced as an infidel from many pulpits, and the alleged materialism of Huxley has been made matter of severest censure and attack.

R. M. W.—But none of the great men you have mentioned have preached infidelity at public meetings up and down the country.

H.—They have been as badly assailed as if they had. It has been charged that they erected science as the foe of religion.

R. M. W.—When urging on you the unpopularity of heresy, I rather referred to the coarser infidelity which attacks the Bible.

H.—Such an attack was made by Colenso.

R. M. W.—But he would not have lectured against the Bible to the lower orders, and he confined his criticisms to the Old Testament.

H.—It is to anti-biblical criticism specially made clear to the people and going beyond the Hebrew books that you object?

R. M. W.—I object that the whole thing is all waste of time: why not leave those matters to the clergy whose business it is, and devote your abilities to something useful?

H.—Do you not regard it as useful to have accurate views on religion? If all questions of faith were left to the clergy, you would leave an unchallenged control over the public mind. Such a control has seldom been used for public advantage.

R. M. W.—But belief in the Bible helps to keep men sober and moral.

H.—Does it? How then do you account for the existence of much crime where there is no heresy?

How do you account for some men being great criminals and yet preachers of the Bible? What do the horrible offences recorded in assize calendars mean?

R. M. W.—These are exceptions; the general result of belief in the Bible is good.

H.—I do not think so. The general result in any country, under any faith, is only good when the general life conditions are favourable to moral conduct. Most convicted murderers have professed some religion; many swindlers have had high reputation for piety.

R. M. W.—I do not desire to argue with you generally on matters of religion; I wanted to point out personally to you that known unbelief is prejudicial to your worldly prospects.

H.—But is it prejudicial to my permanent usefulness to my fellow-men?

R. M. W.—Yes, decidedly yes; there is much good work you might do which now you cannot. There are high positions you might occupy, from which you are excluded. No respectable club will have an avowed infidel as a member.

H.—But many who are not known to be what you call "infidels" are members of clubs; and their unbelief is known to their fellow-members.

R. M. W.—Yes, but they do not publicly lecture about their views.

H.—Then it is not the opinion held but the honest advocacy you object to?

R. M. W.—No one would care what your views were if you did not thrust them on the public.

H.—Suppose that, holding the views, I concealed them, would not this be hypocrisy?

R. M. W.—But you cannot expect respectable men to be identified with one who attacks religion.

H.—Why not? Why should not men associate in any good work, on which they are agreed, notwithstanding their differences of religious opinion? Mohammedans, Roman Catholics, and Protestants of all shades work together on temperance platforms, and most certainly Roman Catholics and Protestants are constantly disturbing one another's religious opinions; sometimes, indeed, breaking one another's heads.

R. M. W.—Oh, yes, but you have no religion.

H.—Just so, and thinking religion mischievous I say so.

R. M. W.—What do you give to the men whose religion you take away?

H.—Sounder judgment on the affairs of life.

R. M. W.—How can the ignorant be expected to exercise that judgment?

H.—I do my best at least on religious questions to dissipate their ignorance.

R. M. W.—But while you thrust your irreligion on the world you close to yourself many opportunities for usefulness.

H.—You mean that so-called religious persons are

afraid of the odium of being known to co-operate with me?

R. M. W.—Put it that way if you like. It at any rate hinders you.

H.—I am not sure that it does if I am strong enough to stand; and if I am weak enough to be hypocrite, I am afraid my sphere of human usefulness will never be very wide.

A MISSIONARY AND AN ATHEIST, ON PROPHECY
AS EVIDENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY.—I

[*"National Reformer,"* October 24th, 1886.]

MISSIONARY.—Why do you disregard the evidence of the truth of Christianity involved in the fulfilment of prophecy?

ATHEIST.—What do you mean by prophecy?

M.—To use the appropriate language of Hartwell Horne, prophecy is "a miracle of knowledge, a declaration or description of something future, beyond the power of human sagacity to discern or calculate, and it is the highest evidence that can be given of supernatural communion with the deity, and of the truth of a revelation from God."

A.—But the acceptance of prophecy then involves the acceptance of what you call "deity" foreknowing the happening of the particular event described in the prophetic passage?

M.—Yes.

A.—When you speak of “deity” foreknowing the happening in the future of a particular event, do you mean that what you call deity causes the event to happen?

M.—Yes.

A.—Does that mean that this deity causes all events to happen?

M.—Certainly.

A.—Does deity then cause the prophet to prophesy, meaning the prophecy to be evidence to me, and at the same time cause me to disbelieve the prophecy?

M.—No, he leaves you your free will.

A.—Does that mean that deity does not know beforehand of any proposition what I will believe, or of any act that I will do?

M.—God knows everything.

A.—Then he does always know what I will believe and what I will do?

M.—Yes.

A.—Can I believe, or do, the contrary of that which God foreknows I shall believe or do?

M.—No.

A.—But if I can only believe or do that which God foreknew I should believe or do, what becomes of my free will?

M.—You are digressing from the value of prophecy as evidence into a mere metaphysical discussion

A.—Heine foretold the terrible German invasion of France. Was that prophecy?

M.—That was a guess or reasoning as to probable national action: it was not prophecy.

A.—Mazzini, in fervid language, foretold the unification of Italy. Was that prophecy?

M.—That was the expression of a hope as to the future of his country which Joseph Mazzini worked to realize: it was not prophecy.

A.—Charles Sumner, in the American Senate, eloquently foretold the abolition of slavery by the United States. Was that prophecy?

M.—That was a judgment on the likely results of a long-sustained anti-slavery agitation: it was not prophecy.

A.—Give me some clear test distinguishing prophecy from, say, Mother Shipton's verses.

M.—The prophecy attributed to Mother Shipton has probably grown in the repetition, and been gradually made to fit the facts after they have happened.

A.—How can a prophecy be tested?

M.—It must clearly tell something that could not be known to the prophet except by supernatural means.

A.—So that to accept prophecy I must first admit the possibility or rather the actuality of the supernatural?

M.—Yes.

A.—But to me nature means everything.

M.—I will agree that nature means everything material.

A.—Do you know anything that is not material?

M.—Yes; soul, angel, devil, God; these are all supernatural.

A.—What do you mean by soul?

M.—The life, the intelligence of each individual human being.

A.—Is the life of a man or woman his or her soul?

M.—Yes.

A.—By life I mean the functional activity of each animal; the normal activity is healthy life: abnormal activity, as in inflammation or arrestment, is disease; cessation of all functional activity, followed by decay, is death. Is the life of a pig its soul?

M.—I speak of the life of a rational being.

A.—But do not many animals, besides human animals, reason?

M.—I decline to be drawn away from the subject of prophecy into a discussion on psychology.

A.—But unless there is the supernatural, prophecy, on your own definition, is impossible.

M.—It is impossible to argue with an Atheist who denies everything.

A.—On the contrary, I accept everything. It is when you affirm other than everything that I wish this surplusage explained to me. Give me an instance of what you call prophecy.

M.—Take Isaiah vii. 1-16. As Hartwell Horne says: "Within three short years the event justified the prophecy in all its parts, though it was without any natural probability."

A.—First, there is not a particle of evidence that this so-called prophecy was recorded before the happening of the events to which it relates; and it is liable to the objection taken by you to Mother Shipton's prophecy. Second, even if spoken before the event to which it relates, it might well be a guess or reasoning founded on political knowledge or conjecture, and would fall under the objection raised by you against the prophecies of Heine, Mazzini, and Sumner.

M.—Take another instance cited by Hartwell Horne: "The destruction of Sennacherib's army, together with all the minute circumstances of his previous advance, was announced by Isaiah a long time before it happened, with this additional circumstance, that such destruction should take place in the night; and that the noise of the thunder that should roll over the Assyrians should be to Jerusalem an harmonious sound, and like a melodious concert, because it would be followed with public thanksgivings. It was these precise and circumstantial predictions that supported the hopes of Hezekiah, notwithstanding everything that seemed to oppose it." You will find this in Isaiah x. 26-28; and following xxix. 6-8; xxx. 29-31, 32.

A.—Again, there is not a shred of testimony to show that this so-called prophecy existed before the events claimed as the fulfilment. In any case, the language is too vague to be worth serious argument.

M.—Take the chief of the predictions as to the Jewish nation—(a) Genesis xii. 1-3; (b) xiii. 14-16; (c) xv. 5; (d) xvii. 2-8; (e) xxii. 17, 18; (f) Exodus xxii. 13.

A.—(a) is not true, and there is no evidence that it has ever been temporarily true; (b and f) it is certain that there is no land anywhere which the Jews have owned in perpetuity; (c) nor have the Jews been innumerable; (d) the land of Canaan has clearly not been an everlasting possession for the Jews; (e) the Jews have scarcely been blessed in Europe during the past fifteen centuries.

M.—I pass to the prophecies relating to the Messiah, which, as Hartwell Horne says, "are astonishingly minute," and I have the more satisfaction on this branch of the subject, because "the great object of the prophecies of the Old Testament is the redemption of mankind." To quote once more Hartwell Horne: "The prophecies which respect the Messiah are neither few in number nor vague and equivocal in their reference, but numerous, pointed, and particular. They bear on them those discriminating marks by which divine inspiration may be distinguished from the conjectures of human sagacity, and a necessary or probable event from a casual

and uncertain contingency. They are such as cannot be referred to the dictates of mere natural penetration, because they are not confined to general occurrences, but point out with singular exactness a variety of minute circumstances relating to times, places, and persons which were neither objects of foresight nor conjecture, because they were not necessarily connected with the principal event, or even probable either in themselves or in their relation. They were such as could only have occurred to a mind that was under the immediate influence of the divinity, by which distant periods were revealed and the secrets of unborn ages disclosed."

A.—Before taking the specific instances of so-called Messianic prophecy, I submit for your consideration a couple of extracts from Dr. Kalisch: "The gift of prophecy, which all ancient nations attributed to elected favourites of the deity, is again nothing else but the gift of human reason and judgment, striving to penetrate through the veil of the future, and hence naturally liable to error." And whilst he claims that the Hebrew prophets were high-minded and unselfish, he says they "were not the less fallible; their activity was absolutely tied to the ordinary limits of the human mind; and therefore they occasionally predicted events which either were not fulfilled at all, or happened in a different manner and form. Thus Amos foretold, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be

led away captive out of their own land,' whereas the historical account relates 'that he slept with his fathers, and Nadab, his son, reigned in his stead.' Jeremiah prophesied of King Jehoiakim, that 'he shall be buried in the burial of an ass, and drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem'; but history tells us that 'he slept with his fathers.' Again, Jeremiah foretold, concerning the Edomites, that all their towns would be given up to eternal desolation, that, in fact, their whole territory would be converted into a dreary, uninhabited desert, the horror and mockery of all strangers, like Sodom and Gomorrah, and that they themselves would be carried away by Nebuchadnezzar like helpless lambs; and gloomy predictions of a similar nature, likewise suggested by deep and implacable hatred, were pronounced by Ezekiel, Obadiah, and other writers. Now, the Edomites were indeed subjugated by the Babylonians, and suffered considerable injuries, but they remained in their land; they succeeded even in appropriating to themselves a part of Southern Judea including Hebron, which was therefore frequently called Idumea; they took an active part in the Maccabean wars, in the course of which they were compelled by John Hyrcanus (about 130 B.C.) to adopt the rite of circumcision, and were incorporated in the Jewish commonwealth. Ezekiel promised the political re-union of the empires of Israel and Judah, which has never been realized. The total

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destruction of Gaza is repeatedly predicted in distinct terms, yet the town exists to the present day."

A MISSIONARY AND AN ATHEIST, ON PROPHECY
AS EVIDENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY. - II

[*"National Reformer," October 31st, 1886.*]

A.—I understood you to describe prophecy as a miracle of knowledge—that is, that the prophet foretold an event which "Deity" intended to happen, but which human forethought was insufficient to predict.

M.—Yes.

A.—Does not that involve that the matters to which the prophecy relates must have been predestined by "Deity"?

M.—Yes.

A.—Does that mean that all events are predestined?

M.—Yes; subject to the fact that man is endowed by God with freedom of will.

A.—Then whether I should be good or wicked must have been predestined before my birth?

M.—You forget that you have a free will.

A.—Did Herod slaughter the little children that prophecy might be fulfilled?

M.—So Matthew says.

A.—Did Herod in slaughtering the little children exercise his free will?

M.—Yes.

A.—But, if Matthew is correct in treating the massacre as prophesied by Jeremiah, was not that slaughter predestined?

M.—God knew how Herod would act.

A.—Could Herod have refrained from slaughtering the little children?

M.—Certainly he could; but God knew the wickedness of his heart.

A.—Several centuries before he was born?

M.—Yes; time makes no difference to God's knowledge.

A.—Are any events the subject of prophecy which are not dependent on man's volition?

M.—There may be such events.

A.—In such cases the events must be predestined by "Deity"?

M.—Yes.

A.—And the happening of some such events may involve advantages or disadvantages to individuals?

M.—Yes.

A.—But will this not show actual partiality of "Deity" for or against such individuals?

M.—The finite must not presume to judge the infinite. We are the creatures of Deity.

A.—Who should therefore treat us all fairly, and does not.

M.—That is blasphemy.

A.—You referred me to the Messianic prophecies.

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I will take them in the order given in the Gospels.
(1) Matthew i.:

"22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

"23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, God with us."

The marginal reference in the Bible is to Isaiah vii. where I read:

"10. Moreover, the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying,

"11. Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God: ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.

"12. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.

"13. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; *Is it* a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

"14. Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

"15. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

"16. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

"17. The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon

thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah ; *even* the king of Assyria.

“ 18. And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall hiss for the fly that *is* in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that *is* in the land of Assyria :

“ 19. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes.

“ 20. In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, *namely*, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet : and it shall also consume the beard.

“ 21. And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* a man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep :

“ 22. And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk *that* they shall give that he shall eat butter : for butter and honey shall everyone eat that is left in the land.

“ 23. And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall *even* be for briers and thorns.

“ 24. With arrows and with bows shall *men* come thither ; because all the land shall become briers and thorns.

“ 25. And *on* all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear

of briers and thorns : but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle."

Are any of the particulars given here in any way applicable to Jesus ?

M.—Verses 17 to 25 are no part of the prophecy.

A.—They are all part of one chapter ; apparently all relate to the one matter. But take verses 14, 15, and 16 : is not the word translated " virgin " in this verse *עלטה* ? and does not that mean a woman of marriageable age ? is not the identical Arabic word used for dancing girls ? is not the proper Hebrew word for virgin *כרוילה* ? and does not Isaiah viii. 3 and 4, show explicitly that a virgin is not meant here ? Where is Jesus in the Gospels called Immanuel ? where is the evidence that he ate butter and honey ? and what shadow of justification is there for pretending that in the case of Jesus there is any fulfilment of verse 16 ?

M.—I am content to read Isaiah as Matthew read it. That Jesus was to be born of a virgin was also prophesied by Jeremiah (xxxi. 22).

A.—Do you really mean that that text has the most remote reference to Jesus ? It reads :

" 22. How long wilt thou go about, O thou back-sliding daughter ? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth. A woman shall compass a man."

The words are ambiguous ; the meaning is vague and obscure. Instead of covering your evasion with

Jeremiah, answer rather the objections I have taken to the alleged prophecy from Isaiah vii.

M.—“The absolute authority of the New Testament,” as has been well observed by Mr. Tregelles, in his note to Gesenius, “is quite sufficient to settle the question to a Christian.”

A.—So that you prove the truth of the New Testament by prophecy, and the prophecy by the New Testament. Convenient to the Christian, but hardly convincing to anybody else. I will go to the next alleged prophecy in Matthew ii.:

“3. When Herod the king had heard *these* things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

“4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

“5. And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet;

“6. And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”

The only place in the Old Testament where anything like this can be found is Micah v.:

“1. Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops; he hath laid siege against us; they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.

“2. But thou, Bethlehem, Ephratah, *though*

thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.

"3. Therefore will he give them up, until the time *that* she which travaileth hath brought forth; then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

"4. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. .

"5. And this *man* shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men.

"6. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver *us* from the Assyrian, when he cometh unto our land, and when he treadeth within our borders."

How do you make this in any fashion into a prophecy of Jesus? Was he ever ruler in Israel? Were the goings-forth of Jesus "from of old, from everlasting"? Was Jesus "peace" when the Assyrian came into Judea? and did Jesus deliver the Jews from the Assyrian when seven shepherds and eight princes were raised up?

M.—You take a narrow and perverse view of the texts, seeking to raise minute and technical difficulties in order to shake the Christian faith, which tends so much to the comfort of man.

A.—At present I leave untouched the tendency of the Christian faith. I am limiting myself to the value of the evidence from prophecy as stated in the Gospels, which you allege to be divinely inspired; and I will take the next given, Matthew ii. :

"14. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt :

"15. And was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son."

The only likeness to this is in the prophet Hosea xi. :

"1. When Israel *was* a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

"2. *As* they called them, so they went from them : they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

"3. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms ; but they knew not that I healed them.

"4. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love : and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

"5. He shall not return into the land of Egypt,

but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.

"6. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour *them*, because of their own counsels."

It surely requires considerable audacity to pretend that this was prophetic of Jesus. It is in the past tense, and relates to the calling out of Egypt narrated in the Pentateuch, with which it has some agreement, whilst it has none whatever with the gospel narrative of the life of Jesus.

M.—The Evangelist Matthew was inspired: he knew that the prophecy in Hosea applied to Jesus, and I refuse to be misled by your sophistries.

A.—Then I will go to the next "prophecy" in order, Matthew ii.:

"16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

"17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy, the prophet, saying,

"18. In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."

The text referred to is Jeremiah xxxi. :

" 15. Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping ; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not.

" 16. Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears : for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord ; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

" 17. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border."

But this refers to Rachel's children, then in captivity, who were to be rescued or released, not to children who were to be slaughtered in the future, and who, being dead, could never "come again to their own border." There is one other prophecy quoted, Matthew ii. :

" 23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, He shall be called a Nazarene."

As there is no such prophecy to be found in any part of the Bible, and the only phrase like it is in Judges xii. 5 and 7, clearly limited to Samson, I leave you for the present with this testimony to explain.

A CHRISTIAN LADY AND AN INFIDEL 139

A CHRISTIAN LADY AND AN INFIDEL

[*"National Reformer," January 23rd, 1887.*]

[The views attributed to the Christian Lady are all taken textually from a small religious book, "The Test of Truth," by Mary Jane Graham, published by S. W. Partridge, and sent to me to convert me. The answers are mine.]

CHRISTIAN LADY.—I will suppose that it is yet a matter of doubt whether the Scriptures are the genuine and lively oracles of God, or the sordid, lying inventions of man.

INFIDEL.—There is another alternative which you have omitted, *i.e.*, that what you called the Scriptures may be a mixture of crystallized tradition and legend, with some errors, some blunders, some truths, some falsehoods, and some misapprehensions, grown together through many centuries.

C. L.—You are, I hope, willing to allow that this universal frame is the work of some divine uncreated intelligence.

I.—If by "universal frame" you mean the universe, I do not make the admission you ask. The words, "some divine uncreated intelligence," imply the possibility of more than one such. I only know intelligence as characteristic of organization, varying in quantity and quality with each organism. I do not understand the sense you intend by "divine uncreated."

C. L.—You are surely not so thoroughly debased in heart as to be able to look round on the wonders of creation without perceiving in them all manifest tokens of creating power.

I.—Is it quite well to assume “debasement” for those who do not believe as you do? Looking round on the phenomena nearest me, I can hardly see tokens of creating power in the Lisbon earthquake, the lava-destroyed Herculaneum, the cinder-smothered Pompeii, or the disrupted Krakatoa.

C. L.—It is enough for my argument if you admit that the existence of God, if not certain, is at least probable; or if not probable, is at least possible.

I.—I can make no such admission until I know what you intend by the word “God.”

C. L.—The various instances of deep design and exquisite contrivance which force themselves upon your notice on every side will not suffer you to deny the possible existence of some great Designer and Contriver.

I.—If each phenomenon has been designed and contrived, how am I to regard the designer and contriver of leprosy? of famine? of cholera? of war? of climate fatal to those not indigenous? of coal and iron useful to man hidden away from him for thousands of years? of rattlesnakes, wolves, and tigers? of a hundred conflicting forms of religion? Is it possible to imagine much corn designed to grow in

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Kansas, and many thousands of human beings designed to starve in Ireland? I cannot imagine it possible that dynamite and melinite were designed to explode amongst human beings contrived by the same designer for the purpose of being blown to pieces.

C. L.—You may pretend to be an Atheist in public, but I am persuaded you are not an Atheist alone. You may boast that you are one in the convivial circle, but you cannot support the character in your closet.

I.—That is your view; but in my case it is certainly not true. I thought myself into Atheism when quite alone, during a period when I had no access to heretical writings, and no opportunity of hearing Atheistical arguments. I have never mixed much in "convivial society," and I have certainly never in such society spoken on theologic questions; much less have I boasted over the winecup. Most of the opinions I now hold on theology have been thought out quite alone. Three times—with years between—have I believed myself about to die, and remained Atheist with the shadow of the grave in my path

C. L.—Surely God has not left himself without a witness even in your heart?

I.—You forget that if your assumption be true, that though I declare myself to be an Atheist yet that I know "God," then you affirm that "God" has

at the same time compelled me to recognize his existence, and enabled me to deny it.

C. L.—A single glance at the various and absurd religions of mankind may suffice to convince us that God is not universally or even generally known upon earth.

I.—Why, then, did you just now suggest that in my case "God's" existence must be known to me? and why do you call the religions held by other people "absurd," and yet feel surprised or indignant that I may apply the same word to your own creed?

C. L.—Out of so many different Gods, only one can be the true God.

I.—But assuming the possibility of coherent meaning for the phrase "one true God," how do you account for any false Gods having been accepted? How can you distinguish the "true God"?

C. L.—Whoever God is, it must be obvious to both Christians and Infidels that the world in general knows very little about him.

I.—You may go further with safety, Madam, and say that the world in general knows nothing at all about him; but is not your own assumption the exact contradiction of your assumption that "God" had left witness of his existence in the heart of every human being?

A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY AND A SCEPTIC

[*"National Reformer," October 16th, 1857.*]

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY.—Do you deny immortal life?

SCEPTIC.—The words immortal life are to me contradictory. By life I mean "the totality of functional ability, its activity and result in each individual organism." To speak of life as immortal is confusing.

C. M.—But you ignore the soul?

S.—I have no meaning for the word "soul" if you imply an entity other than the living animal or vegetable.

C. M.—But where does the life go when a man dies?

S.—Do you ask where the life goes when an oyster dies?

C. M.—That is an evasion, and there is no fair comparison between the life of an oyster and that of a man.

S.—Each organism differs from all other organisms, or it could not be distinguished in thought. The word "life" only expresses state of organism, *i.e.*, the state of the particular organism described as living. Normal life is health; abnormal activity, excess, or collapse, would be disease. Cessation of activity, and negation of its possible resumption, is

death. You do not ask where the life of a sheep has gone when you have converted the sheep into mutton pie.

C. M.—But sheep is not intelligent as is man.

S.—Sheep is more intelligent than oyster; but why do you mix up intelligence with this assertion of immortality?

C. M.—The soul, which is immortal, is intelligence as well as life.

S.—What you call intelligence, which you do not define, is to me the totality of nervous encephalic ability, its activity and results in each animal. I cannot conceive the individual intelligence of any animal continuing in activity after the individual animal has died.

C. M.—But where do you say life goes when the breath leaves the body?

S.—When an animal permanently ceases to breathe, no breath leaves his body and there is no life to go anywhere.

C. M.—Yours is a black doctrine of annihilation.

S.—Instead of finding unpleasant colour for a doctrine that I do not hold, explain your own view. Do you say that a man does live when he has died and whilst he is dead?

C. M.—I say that the Bible teaches that man has an immortal life—that man is a living soul.

S.—Before dealing with the supposed teaching of any book let me be sure that I know what you mean.

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Do you mean that man continues to live notwithstanding that he has died?

C. M.—Man's soul lives.

S.—The body ceases to be a living body?

C. M.—Yes; the body is mortal, it is the soul lives on.

S.—Can you afford me any means of distinguishing what you call soul as separate from the body, or of identifying a soul living on after the death of the body?

C. M.—You reject the Bible.

S.—Apart from the Bible, can you answer my question?

C. M.—The best and most intellectual men believe in the immortality of the soul.

S.—My question is, can you afford me to-day any means, apart from the Bible and apart from the belief of others, of identifying a soul as living on after the death of its body?

C. M.—If you will not believe, it is useless to reason with you.

S.—It is not a question of my willingness or unwillingness to believe, but it is rather a question of your ability to make yourself clear on propositions to which you ask my assent. What do you mean by soul?

C. M.—Man's immortal spirit.

S.—That is only a change of words; it is not an explanation of meaning. What do you mean by man's immortal spirit?

C. M.—That which is intelligent and living in man.

S.—Is that which is intelligent and living in an ox its immortal spirit ?

C. M.—The intelligence of an ox is very different from that of a man.

S.—But the ox lives : has an ox immortal life, or when it dies does it cease to live ?

C. M.—That is always the way with infidels ; you try to reduce man to the level of the beast.

S.—That is not true, and if it were true would at least as to dying have the scriptural justification, "As the one dieth, so dieth the other" ; but as you say the soul is that which is intelligent in man, I will ask you whether the basis of intelligence is sensation and memory of sensation ?

C. M.—No doubt the soul uses the senses

S.—Leaving aside "soul," which you have not defined, what kind of intelligence would you expect to find in a person born without sight, hearing, taste, or smell ?

C. M.—You take an almost impossible case.

S.—Or in the case of a congenital idiot ? Do you say that the intelligence of the idiot boy is his soul ?

C. M.—I do not deny that there are some mysteries, but these do not justify your disbelief.

S.—But does your absolute inability to explain what you mean by "soul" justify your requiring me to believe that which to me is meaningless, and with you is inexplicable ?

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C. M.—But what explanation do you give of life and intelligence?

S.—It is rather on those who assert that the onus of explanation should rest. Functional ability is inherited, and depends on the parents and their surroundings, meaning by parents much more than the immediate father and mother. Functional ability may be developed under good conditions; may be checked and arrested under hostile conditions. Individual life varies according to heredity and life surroundings. The sensitive abilities are results of heredity, the scope and intensity of their exercise varying; the ability to remember sensations differing: the brain, as to quantity, quality, and convolutions, peculiar to each individual; the nervous centres and nerve system different, though like. Life and intelligence are the word-labels of physical states and results. When the man dies, it is absurd to describe him as living.

C. M.—But your argument would make consciousness a mere attribute of matter, and we all know matter cannot think.

S.—By matter, if I use the word, I mean the totality of all phenomena and of all that is necessary for the happening of any phenomenon; that is = existence = everything. By totality I only mean infinite—that is, indefinite—quantity. The material phenomenon iron pot, or granite block, does not think. The material phenomenon man, or cat, does

think. There is no general consciousness in any animal, there is an ever varying state of mind as long as the animal lives and thinks.

C. M.—But surely there is a vital principle in man.

S.—Why more than a digesting principle?

C. M.—But the huge majority of mankind believe that there is a vital principle in man, and that the soul is that principle.

S.—It would be as conclusive and relevant to say that the huge majority in every nation have at some period believed as true some proposition which at another period the huge majority have rejected as false. And the “huge majority” scarcely ever believe: they acquiesce, and drift with the stream; having much the same effective relation to the creed of the day that the clay has to the river which, holding it in suspension, carries it towards the sea.

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